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ABOUT MANY THINGS

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THE WOOING OF SHEILA

THE PRINCE OF LISNOVER

THE DIVERTED VILLAGE

FIVE BEADS ON A STRING

ABOUT MANY THINGS

BY

GRACE RHYS

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TO

STELLA

NOTE

OF these essays some have appeared in magazines—*The Quest, The Vineyard, The Venturer, The Voice of India, The Shanachie*—to whose editors the author wishes to make due acknowledgment. Others have been privately printed. A good many, however, are here given for the first time.

A like word is also due to the Editor of *The Nation,* in whose pages the prefatory verses have appeared.

PREFACE

I HAVE been puzzled to know what to call these leaves and pages from the life. "Essays" appears almost too formal a word; though they are truly attempts at expressing thought and the emotion of thought. I say emotion because it seems to me that when we are most closely in contact with life, there comes, sometimes, a sort of stir, like the trembling of the water in the pool of Bethesda, and out of such inner movement a thought may be born.

It is just this instant and circumstance of thought that I have tried to lay hold of and render again. Each note or essay has been set down under the influence of that same movement of life. Nothing has been added

that is not born out of a woman's experience as she faces her ordinary everyday life.

Some of the essays are longer, some of them shorter, for some thoughts seem to need more of circumstance about them, as some kites balance better with additional paper flourishes on their tails. But whether long or short, they are each of them an honest attempt to express a vital moment.

We are all out to find a new spiritual dialect in art, in music, and in thought. New and powerful spectacles of life are before us. We try to get some notion of their movement and force, that we can translate into a paraphrase that is fit to be imparted, fit for use. We have a sense that out of the fluid regions of the intellectual issue all the mighty things of life; horrible things and false things; things also unimaginably beautiful and fine.

The clearing of this region of our common mind becomes then the most important thing in life. We are and have been tormented

with false thinking. Mankind has always been inexpressibly tormented by it.

For the thinker, the way out of that danger is to keep close to the near and familiar source from which thought springs. Thought rises like a wholesome perfume from life itself. Abstract it too much from life and it weakens, strays, becomes useless and untrue. For this reason the sources of thought are given in these essays as well as the thought itself; so that all readers can arrive at the same, or a better thought than mine, in their own minds.

And though these moments of thought may seem disconnected, they are orderly after their own fashion. As a traveller towards a fixed and distant point records his adventures by the way, always drawing nearer to his journey's end, so these pages record, stage by stage, adventures of the mind on its way to a height or hill-top whence the other country, the isles of youth, and the regions of pure intelligence may be seen.

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My black flocks wander on the bitter salt marshes;
In the mist they feed and drink:
They pick at the sea-holly and the rough plants and grasses,
At the marsh water's brink.

My white flocks stray about the landward meadows;
Their fleeces shine;
With lowered heads they feed on the tender herbs and flowers,
Tasting their honey-wine.

But my horned sheep spring, and go upon the mountains,
Lifting their heads to the wind:
Out on the crags they stand; they drink of the running water,
In the way of their kind.

ABOUT MANY THINGS

LEAVES FROM A MEADOW-FIELD

I

Four O'clock in the Morning

ONE can often please oneself by imagining what cannot be seen, the motion of sound waves in the air. A good idea of their possible shapes can be got by taking a brazen bowl and filling it with water. If the sides of the bowl are then filliped by a strong finger, the surface of the water answers as if by magic to the musical sound of the brass; it is at once covered all over with a pattern like that of folded feathers or overlapping rose-leaves. Take another bowl and strike it; it gives out a different note, and on the water you see repeated the luminous scales of a fish.

If you want to gain a vision of sound shapes, go and look at a rose and see the round curves

rippling away from its heart. A red rose is the very flower of sound.

Think of the beauty of it: imagine a sound spirit free of the sound world. Away off he sees a shower of blue wings spreading and changing, rising and falling again and again: it is a church bell. Down he comes and looks in at the windows. From the far end of the church rises a fountain in many-coloured spray; the organ is playing. The whole building is filled with rainbow showers, pearl-shape, leaf-shape, feather-shape, flower-shape; narrow rings and wide rings falling broken only to rise again.

Imagine the sound spirit at four of the clock on a summer morning, when the birds are up: why, the woods are all wreathed in jewels!

II

Number Six

SIX has always been a neglected number. Number three has too long robbed it of its honour. Every one knows the dignity, the fatality that are attached to number three. The Welsh bards could scarcely make a poem without it. Nine, as the square of three, has always been revered. We know that the ninth wave is the largest, the most terrible. As for seven, it is easily king among the numbers. Seven notes in the scale, seven days in the week, seven colours in the rainbow, and seven archangels. Thus it is that six, overshadowed by the majesty of its sister numbers, has never had the honour that belongs to it by right, and here and now I desire to instate it.

For is it not the water-number?

Water is altogether the slave, the servant of number six. Wherever it is found, whether in vapour or any other shape, it is ruled by number six. Wherever and on whatever star water

appears, let the cold but visit it, and ice flowers and ice patterns must appear also; and wherever they are seen, there the number six rules; the patterns, infinite in variety, must all be six-rayed, six-starred, six-sided; the ice flowers must be six-petalled, one and all. The block of ice you pass in the fishmonger's shop is just as inherently and mathematically the slave of six. Such a block is far from being the simple thing it appears; any sun-ray falling upon it will unlock the crystal charm. The warm beam steals within, the shining points appear; six-petalled flowers of many shapes, made of water with ice-walls, begin to form; give the sun time, and the whole block will be cloven and splinter into blossom; for it is built on the crystal plan, its architecture exactly miraculous.

I know a river pool whose floor and sides are of rock. The stream gushes in, shaking the pool, and pours out—liquid diamond and emerald—making the while an extraordinary merry noise. When watching it I have remembered the cold of winter, the silence of the frost, the myriad of ice-blossoms; no wonder, I thought, the water is beautiful, it is not what it seems; every drop of it is woven of flowers, six-plumed, six-pointed, every one.

And then the snow! We all know that the snow falls on them in flower-shapes and crystal wheels, all six-pointed.

It is a question how great this power of water may be in the scheme of things. I drink water, I would die without it, yet there is no number six in me. One nose, two eyes, five fingers! Clearly the human genius is not a watery one! The meadow flowers are depending on the rain, they feed on water and earth, yet where will you find a six-petalled one? For days I scoured the meadows and hedges. There they all were—our old friends, the buttercup, with five polished leaves, the many-rayed daisy, and the dandelion that copies the sun; the red robin—five and twice five; the hawthorn in the hedge with five petals; the red clover and the white; the little yellow clover, all with their five-toothed tubes. It was the same with the other flowers, every one that I picked—far too many to name; my disappointment was great.

Then an idea came to me. What if I went down to the water? I went, and, behold! there stood the tall iris declaring the power of the water in noble, yellow, flag-like petals, threes and sixes! The water-plantains, the flowering rushes, the actinocarpus with its floating leaves and its

fruit like a six-pointed star; the Bog Asphodel with its six-rayed flower that loves to stand with wet feet; they all declared the power of the water. So do the bulb-flowers that depend so greatly upon water that they will grow in a vessel of clean stones if they but touch the water between.

Each fresh discovery seemed more enchanting than the last.

What is it fills the mind with a half-passionate excitement when it first catches a glimpse of such mysteries as these? It is almost as though for one heavenly moment one laid hold of the trailing garment of the great Mother of us all.

III

From the Green World

SITTING alone in a green place, you can after a time distinguish the little rustling noises made by the meadow flowers and grasses, which are pushing one another with their leaves and shoots, and reaching a little higher each day to the warm, motherly-beaming sun. It may be ridiculous, but I like to fancy myself one of them, rooted fast in my place, simply stretching upward to a light that I do not understand.

When the wind comes, I nod my head with the rest, and a pleasant music answers all over the fields. The little bugs, the green and the brown, scramble up my stem and leaves, and fall down again, cheerfully spraddling about. They do not care if they never get anywhere at all in a whole long day. The creeping earth is full of interesting things coming and going; of beetles' shrieks and whistles, and merry doubling worms.

I do not want to rise and go: God knows

what trouble might befall if I did; it is enough for me to rock myself in the sweet, streaming air, nursing my flower-buds, longing for the day when they shall open, when in my golden cups I shall hold the wine of sunlight, at last transcendently awake.

The birds are my friends as they come hopping with their round, shining eyes. Even the mighty cock pheasant with his crimson-splashed feather coat I do not fear: he parts us so swimmingly as he strolls along. But the hideous rabbit, with his mouthful of monstrous teeth, dressed in stuffy wool, is my enemy from the furthest days. I shudder in all my fine greenness when I hear the thumping of his odious pads.

Alas for my pretty sisters in the pasture fields! Never do any of my kind let go the memory of the days when we possessed the earth—before dreaded monsters rose and tore at the gentle trees; before the hoof of the bull and the terrible horse invaded the earth. From far, far away the rooted things felt that footfall thrill the soil, and trembled before the coming of hoof and sucking tongue and grinding teeth; as terrible to them as the thrill of the axe is to the tree.

IV

Children of Summer

HERE they are all again, the summer children, so many they are hardly to be counted! Here are two at once, ill-matched, flying past the door of this meadow-study—a round wild bee, black, red-tailed, and woolly, humming loud; a white butterfly is in his company; it seems to make less sound as it goes by than the breeze that tosses it, yet the bee hears well enough the flimsy wings flapping behind him.

Below in the grass are the beetle children—hundreds and thousands of them—all sorts of fantastic shapes and colours, trimmed extravagantly in shining enamel, in painted spots, and bands; in knight's armour, cavalier's plumage, ladies' shining gowns. Here is the horse-fly, the smaller brown one; and hither, too, with his horrid hum, comes the great horse-fly whom St. Patrick turned out of Ireland along with the snakes. He has a name too bad to put down;

he wears a double cap of dull green and crimson on his head. The horses tremble when they hear him come; the blood runs down to the hoof from the wound he makes on their tough quarters. The merry Devon maids shriek when they feel his bitter bite. Yet he does not carry death as does that savage bee of the moors with the curved, terrible sting, one of the Botulus sort.

Here is another kind of death-messenger, the blue-bottle fly. She is clad in handsome blue armour, dark and shining. With what speed she goes! No wonder that an Indian poet compares the charge of the Sikh warriors to the straight rush of the blue-bottle fly. Like a tiny bullet from a gun she is up and away over the hill to the moors. Her hum spreads terror among the sheep. Too well does the blue-bottle know that pleasant spot where the horns grow up among the curls of the warm wool—the very spot for a thriving family; there they can hatch out, there they can burrow and find sweet subsistence, till the sheep (unless the shepherd find him) runs mad for miles over the moors, and dies at last. Yes, this is the Midsummer-fly, Servant of the Sun, Carrion destroyer, godmother to the clean white bone, that she skills to bring so quickly to the light.

Children of Summer

Sun-lover, sun-follower, the swallow comes, so swift in the heavenly blue that he draws the heart from the breast to follow him in his flight. Blue-winged he is, grey-backed, salmon-breasted, red-throated, with his beloved black head and broad beak. How he breaks and turns in his flight, now undulating ribbonlike, now firm and sharp and swift, double arrow shaped: no child of the sun so happy as he.

Yes; here they are all again, the children of summer, these and many more; birds and dragonflies and hateful midges and myriad much-adorned creeping things, each and all deriving their activities from the sun. Right beside me a combat goes on between a spider and a little devil's coach-horse. Desperately the coach-horse flings the tail end of him over his back, trying to reach the spider with his sting. Tiger-like the spider grips his head and holds him, keeping out of the way of the terrible tail. One wants his dinner, the other his happy life. Suddenly the god descends from his car, and in a moment they are not. Gone is the dinner, gone the happy life; the devilish struggle is laid to sleep.

There goes another of the summer children, this time a daughter of men, bright-cheeked and strong, with a curled and tossing mane of red-

gold hair. Now she stands on the side of the coombe among the heather and bracken, and the sun beats down on her, clothing her with a garment of brightness. She is staring at a haughty foxglove five foot high, a spire that rings a hundred crimson bells, the proudest of the flowers. Is she delighted with its beauty? Why, that is as may be; but all at once I hear a sharp crack like the report of a toy pistol; one by one the ruddy-haired maid is cracking the bells with her busy hands, and throwing them split and tattered to the ground.

V

The Foot of the Wind

THERE are three things that leave the same track behind them: the feet of the wind on the loose sand, raising it into curves and ridges; the feet of the wind on the water; and the feet of the water on the sand.

It was an October day, fine and warm after a stormy night, when I first really noticed the track of the wind on the sand-dunes of Ynyslas. There even under the thinly growing rushes the sand was patterned with symmetrical curves and ridges exactly like those left by the tide upon the shore. I was filled with wonder. The invisible was here made visible. Water and wind, then, were brother and sister, and moved and stepped alike. For a moment it was as though I had seen the foot-prints of an invisible companion treading beside my own.

Sometimes, but more rarely, it happens that the foot of the wind, passing through the arches of the sky, leaves the same track upon the cloud.

We all know those mackerel skies ridged so fairly and evenly with white cloud. A wise friend has just now been telling me how these cloud-ridges are made. When two wind streams meet, says he, flowing in different directions, and one warmer than another, there is sometimes a rippling where the edges join; it is in the hollows of these wind ripples that the wisps of cloud vapour are born.

Once, in a mountain country, I saw a ridged shadow, cast from such a sky, slowly trailing upon the hills. Could anything more soundless and insubstantial be imagined than the travelling shadow on the grass of the wind's foot in the sky?

The fish's back, the shell, even the rocks sometimes, carry the wind and water pattern most beautifully printed upon them. I have looked for the wind ripple in leaves and flowers, but cannot find it printed anywhere. But it is to be seen in June passing over the tops of meadows where the grass is deep.

VI

Larkspurs

MEMORY, who is the true dispensator of Time, refuses to be bound by the Roman Calendar. She has her own trick of counting, and prefers the old-fashioned way of the notched stick or the knotted string. She will make little of, or let slip altogether, the most important dates only to store up in faithful colours some half-idle moment. Most of all Memory seems to love the time and place when she catches sight of a new idea; at once she fetches out her long string and ties another knot, running the old ones between her fingers the while, as a nun runs her beads.

One such knot I believe my memory to have tied with particular pleasure on a day when I sat down in a garden to think out a difficulty. It was a hot day in early July, and the garden was full of flowers. For a long time I sat pondering, with my eyes fixed on what seemed to be a blue lake of sky shining through the branches of a

grove of trees that backed the garden. Suddenly my attention awoke; I saw that what I had so long been looking at was not sky at all but a cloud of larkspurs—thousands of blossoms that made a pool of blue against the trees. It was a moment of delight. Why I was so rejoiced I cannot tell. There was the blue sky above the tree-tops; there were the larkspurs, a joyous company, dressed in the very same shade of blue below. How did they know? By what magic did they come to be wearing that same celestial colour? Heaven has twice blessed these flowers; they know it is real, that blue of the sky: they know it even better than the lake-water, for they have stolen it outright. And but a while ago I read with a disappointed mind that that blue has no real existence, and is only due to the scattering of the light from the particles of dust and water of which the air is full.

I went near to the larkspurs and looked at them; there were a thousand thousand blossoms, each one winged and spurred, and each one wearing a different hue of blue; and in every blossom many blues again, purple, ultramarine, streaks of crimson, pale lilac. I stood a little farther off, and, lo and behold! all these thousand blues repeated upon one note the blue of the sky.

Larkspurs

Think as I may, still I cannot tell why I was so delighted, or more than delighted, when I first saw the larkspurs, and realized it was an earthly blue of flowers at which I had so long been looking. What I felt was an involuntary movement of the spirit, exactly described by the Greek word "ecstasy"; a sudden escape into a brighter place.

VII

Live Wood and Dead Wood

THERE is one particular spot on Hampstead Heath where the hawthorns flower with a fantastic beauty. One week and the birds are fairly contented with the brown knobbed perches they have known all the winter through. Next week and these perches are covered with a shower of green points shaped like the drops of rain that have hung so often in rows along the under side of the boughs. I have watched a last year's bird hopping sideways along a branch, staring at the miracle of this his first spring, and picking the green buds to see what they were made of.

Yet another week and the round green balls are turned to green feathers; the birds fairly shout in the mornings. It is the first dressing of the bowers.

A little while longer and the wonder arrives. The tree that was green is turned to snow. The whole air is perfumed. You would say a white

sparkling wave had broken in foam over the green. The trees shine in the light; they are the swans of the valley; they are alabaster images swinging snow-breathing censers; painted clouds of perfume lit down, warm, upon the grass. In the dusk they give out a glimmering white light of their own. In the sunlight they resemble white burning stars. The birds are now intoxicated by their own private joys and the splendour of their lodgings. I have seen a thrush sit in his silver palace and sing with a sweetness and a passion that King David might have envied.

The birds are more fortunate than we. Spring never ventures within our walls to set our chairs and cabinets bursting into blossom. Compared with a thrush's parlour, our parlours are mere museums. Our artifices in dead wood yield an eternal crop of dust. It is one of Eve's penalties that she must be for ever dusting.

VIII

The White Light

IN the bevelled edge of a mirror, when there is sun in the air though not on the glass, fragments of rainbow-coloured light are to be seen. A round or oval mirror with a broad bevelled edge gives the most gorgeous colours, and the morning light seems to break up better than that of the afternoon or evening.

Such a truly appalling dazzle of brilliant colours may sometimes be caught in this way—such broken bars and bands of flaming colour, blue, purple, crimson, orange, and gold—that one is thankful for the mercy that binds these many flames into one fair unbroken veil of cool white light.

Behind this veil lie hidden what seas of fire, what leaping cataracts of purple heat, what thunder of awful falling golden spray!

Are there creatures that live upon the plane of the broken light? I had rather be an inhabitant of our white land.

IX

Radiances

"DO you love butter?" say the children; they hold a buttercup under your chin, and by the yellow light that rises up from it and paints your throat, they know that you love butter.

Does every one know that the air about a yellow flower is dyed yellow, that the yellow beams shoot upward? That a golden cloud hovers over a June field? A cloud indeed! A fire rather—a summer fire that delights the eye.

It was the children that discovered that the buttercup throws upward its tiny fountain of golden light. The rest of us are hardly near enough to what one may call the small immensities, to have realized this great little thing.

It is the source of our love for flowers, this jetting forth of radiance. The light that falls upon them is cast back into the air, dyed to their own several colours. The flowery garden of June is tented in a thousand many-coloured aureoles. Quite three-foot depth of air all round a bush of

broom in May is dyed golden. Put your hand within the circle, you will see that it is so. Lean your face within it, it will be all painted and lit up with a golden glory. Hold your flat hand a foot above a crimson rose tree in full bloom and it will be dyed rose colour. This summer I saw an enormous crimson rose lolling on a grey stone balustrade in the sun, casting forth the perfume and crimson light from its cupped leaves. I saw a face that stooped to that rose bathed in that crimson glow.

We should be more grateful to the flowers did we realize this gift of theirs ; they are the lamps of the daytime, unspeakably bright. The gardener's work is to light up many-coloured lamps for the joy of the folk that pass by, as well as for his own. That they do give delight is certain. Let anyone walk through a slum, carrying a bunch of roses ; a flock of children will inevitably come down upon you, like forest things, crying, actually leaping, with imploring arms and fingers, after the flowers. I have looked out of my window at dawn and seen an early morning tramp steal a flower from my garden—not to sell again (he could not have sold it), but just to please himself with its beaming face as he trailed along : and I never grudged the rose.

Jewels, of course, share this faculty of charming the eye by their jetting forth of coloured light. The diamond does more; it actually splits up the white light and shoots out pointed spears of crimson, green, and blue, fifteen or twenty feet into the air. It is a great pity those hideous early Victorian candlesticks that were trimmed with a dropping fringe of glass prisms are seen no more. No toy is so charming as a prism. To play with little rainbows is a delight to any child. Anything that reminds us that we live in a rainbow is a blessing. A dinner-table spread with cut glass where the sun can reach it becomes a pattern of adorable little rainbows and lakes of coloured moving light. The bevelled edge of a mirror reveals these ordered bars with almost ferocious brilliance; most forcibly do they remind one of the sunbeats from whence they come. But the loveliest collection of rainbows anywhere may be seen at sea. With a lively wind and a bright sun at the right angle to the waves, you will, if you are lucky, behold the arch of every wave filled with a rainbow sailing within the wave until it breaks. A whole sea may be seen like that gemmed with rainbow-filled waves, each with the horned crest of foam above.

More subtle even than these rainbow lights are

the human radiances, especially when the physical is secretly reinforced by the powers of the soul. Most of all is this true of the eye. Who does not know that beautiful gliding star that irradiates the eye? There are eyes like brown pools in a wood; eyes like skiey windows lit by the stars; terrible eyes that dart forth spears and arrows. And the evil eye! God preserve us from its vengeful light!

We all have seen "hair like the golden wire." In hair of this kind every separate thread of the millions that go to make the complete tress is polished and shining, casting back the light with fine glitterings; and even you may see tiny spider-thin rainbows clinging to such hair in strong sunlight. Such hair sheds a golden radiance about the face and neck which it encloses. Again, the shadow of black locks falls very beautifully on the brow of the dark boy or girl. Then it is that one discovers the true radiance of the brow. I have seen a thoughtful forehead shine from among black locks with a light like that of a pure, translucent pearl.

There seems to me to be a particular radiance of old age. One remembers wonderful silver heads: ay, and faces of silver. Once such I particularly remember. Long ago in a remote

country district of Wales, I was waiting for the train. The stationmaster's little house backed the platform, and as I passed, the curtains were drawn aside and an old man's face looked out. The beard, hair, and eyebrows were snow-white. The flesh of the face was white like wax and still as stone. Yet the face was very bright. Stationmasters in Wales are often poets. They have so little to do. I am sure this old man was a poet, and that it was for him that the banks were all planted with quantities of flowers.

In a book that everybody knows there is a character that makes her appearance for the space of two lines and then vanishes for ever again. She was called "the mother of Marcella," and here is her whole history. "She was a woman who had the sun on one side of her face and the moon on the other." These are words that say more than words were ever meant to. They have touched the line when sense passes into music; or are they more significant than music? They express, better than any words I know, the supernatural lustre of beauty.

X

The Cool of the Day

A WALLED garden at dusk: what happy moments I have had in such a place. A great deal happens in a garden at dusk. Spend an hour there at the time of the departure of the light, and your eyes, if they are opened, will see wonders enough and to spare. There is a special kind of delight felt at dusk; it is quite different from morning pleasure; all young creatures feel it; rabbits, birds, lambs, young calves, colts, children: if you watch them, you will see them begin to play as soon as the light changes.

For it is not only that the light is withdrawn, it changes as well. Anyone who walks in a garden at this hour becomes conscious of what I may call the breaking of the light. The flowers know it and feel it and give out a richer perfume than at any other time. Some are specially children of the day, cups or discs made to hold the sunlight, and these nod and sleep in the dusk. But there are others that enjoy the dusk and seem to live a fuller life. The first thing you

will notice if you are watching in the garden is the darkening of the green and the fading of the blue. Green grows black; while blue, a purer more ethereal colour, pales into white. This is very strange. Often as I have seen this happening, still I think it strange: blue and green seem so brotherly together in the daytime. They lie beside one another in the rainbow: it is strange their ways should lie so far apart at night.

At the hour of dusk the air is full of miracle. The sun is shepherding his flock of returning beams. The complete unbroken white light is departing.

Now comes a golden shower; the yellow flowers shine, and the orange burn again. The red light falls in a thousand crimson spears; see how the red flowers awake in joy; this is their moment. The red roses throw out a double perfume: the fuchsia bells hang like drops of blood. The red geraniums glow like fire. At this hour I have seen tall gladioli stand up like a company of flaming standards against black bushes. The trees everywhere are very dark against the sky: this is not their hour; the green is dropped asleep. Now the red spears are withdrawn and veils of blue and violet begin to fall. Under the blue veils the blue flower whitens and grows more ethereal.

Watch the white flowers now. As a child I

remember noticing one favourite spot in the meadows where many ox-eye daisies grow together. I remember getting out of bed in the delicious summer dusk to lean from the open window and see how, as colour vanished from the grass, the large white daisies stood glimmering like little moons. There is a ragged-looking white daisy that is pleased to grow along sundry roadsides in open country: in the deep dusk these flowers shine and grow very beautiful; you can guide your way by their light.

All the sevenfold colours must be hived in the bosom of the white lily and the white rose, for they surely give out light with their fragrance, as they stand and shine like lamps in their places. Find your way to the white flowers in a garden when it is all but dark; watch and see how the moths flutter round them and crawl upon them, delighting in their brilliance.

The scattered blue light of heaven still lingers, mixing light with obscurity. It darkens upon grass and trees, and remains to enlighten white pathways, garments white or blue, or the face of water which is clear and clean.

The latest rays of all delay in cloudless spaces of the upper air; then they too must undertake their western journey over the edge of the world.

The Cool of the Day

A friend of mine has told me that when a boy he used to have strange vague feelings at sunset; there were times when he seemed to be aware of open gates in the west and a half-circle of lambent forms that leaned on the earth's edge bidding him farewell. If children, even babes, can be so strangely aware, the flowers too must in some way apprehend. How do they, in their innocent, scarcely stirred peace, receive the mystery of this burnished white radiance, that crosses unhurt the wind and the rain, from whose opened sheath they draw all their beauty and all their life?

We see them rejoice; we see them climbing and stretching towards the light; and no one can walk in a garden at dusk without feeling that the time of dews and darkness is a time too of pleasure for the flowers. Who can say but that they are conscious of each other's presence, happy in their garden; awake—I am sure they are awake—to the perfume that each other sheds?

Obedient in their places, and yet so radiantly featured in joy, these gentler children of the Creator have no liberty nor skill to fight and ravin and destroy. There is no passion in them, nor any sin. What wonder then that the Lord God walked, ay, and perhaps still walks, in a garden, in the cool of the day?

XI

Foresters

THERE are everywhere brotherhoods and resemblances in nature, some curious and beautiful, some wild, awful, and strange.

Such are the solemn countenance of the full-maned lion, which is like the sun at noon; the overtones of the cuckoo's spring call, which exactly resemble those of a church bell tolling at a distance; the likeness of the live creature of a dream to a dead man's thought.

There are a thousand such: I could be all day telling them—the wonders I have known; the ringed eye of the sea-creature, desiring light, that looks up from the wave's imprisonment to mine, which is its fellow; the purple centre of the flame, still as the hollow of the wind; the joy and sorrow of the bird, so like my own, and born of the same causes; the winter morning window-pane that draws a picture of the forest of a million years ago; the human hand, so like the leaf of a tree, released from its webbing and

set to the work of creation:—there is no end to these surprises.

Often and often I discover a likeness between men and their captive brethren, the trees, who grow and live as they do. Like men, they live by the sunlight, the air, and the rain; like men, they gather beauty and strength from each other, when not too closely pressed together. Indeed, there is a fair and wonderful spirit of life abroad in the wood. I am often moved when I witness again the altogether seemly captivity of the trees:—how dignified they stand in their silence, hearing as in a dream the music of the wind, the million running feet of the rain: conscious of each other's presence:—those brown columns stand very brotherly together.

Our greater freedom of motion and speech brings with it a terrible penalty, the liberty of escape from natural beauty and calm. How fearful, how nightmare-like would it be, were we to see the great limbs of the oak receive the double gift, see him rush from his place, and with horrid cries rend and break that comely ash or noble beech! We have enough and too much of such freedom among ourselves. (I cannot understand it, our hideousness, in a world where the pull of order and beauty is so strong!) We

may well be thankful for the silence and imprisonment of the trees.

Yet there is still another sense that awakes within us, when we enter the cool of a wood after a noisy, human day. Is it that all the life and being, all the joy of these solemn creatures, is up on top and out of sight? High over the head they welcome the sun and hush the wind away. So one might stand among the Great Ones and hear their converse passing, from one to another, far away, not understood.

XII

Daughters of the Air

SKIES are not yet gone out of fashion in the country. Down there an intelligent person can tell by looking at them whether or no it is likely to rain. There are also outlandish people who will tell you the time by merely casting a glance at the sun on its way. But in the streets of our cities, where rain can be avoided by merely getting into an omnibus, and where clocks are nearly as plentiful as trees in the country, very few people are ever to be seen looking at the sky.

For one thing our necks are not built on at quite the right angle; though better off in that way than the cow, we are scarcely so nicely adapted as the thrush. Our eyes too are hardly strong enough; they should wear eagle's hoods for sky-gazing. Then there is the human drama of the stream of passing faces to distract the mind: for female eyes there is the bait of the shop-window; for men there is the craft of getting and having.

And yet that heavenly parallelogram across which pieces of shorn cloud continually pass, is well worth an upward glance. What a pity that natural wonders so soon cease to astonish. For a few seasons the child is astonished at the wind. For ten or twelve winters the snow is a wonder. For a while only the voyaging of the clouds is matter for questions. I know a little child who used to be afraid to go out on a dull day for fear the heavy clouds should fall on her and crush her. Now she knows them securely balanced on the wind's back, and her fear is changed to delight in their extravagances. As the years go on she will cease to marvel, and look upward not so often.

Eyes and mind soon become accustomed to a miracle that happens every day and in time notice no more. I do believe that if our city skies could suddenly become early Italian, deep blue, studded with flights of red-robed angels blowing on golden trumpets, and dotted with winged, bodiless cherubs, we should soon grow used to it, and saying, "It is only the angels," our men would hurry head down to their offices and our women to their beloved shops.

And yet the changing moods of our skies should be wonderful enough to hold us spell-

bound for a moment, quite irrespective of any augury of the weather. Our brothers the clouds are great and beautiful creatures, wonderful in themselves, most wonderful in their attributes.

For instance, who could suppose that a mist of vapour could hold fire in its heart? Who could have imagined, if they had not seen, the sheets of flame that they can pour out; who that had not heard it could have invented the truly appalling noise of the thunder? It ought to be as astounding as if an exploding pistol should be born of a down pillow, or a dagger of a lady's ball-dress. Any human creature caught in a thunderstorm without previous knowledge of the subject would probably go mad or die of terror.

The miracle of the noise of the thunder is only fully appreciated by those who know in what deep silence clouds pursue their journeys. Climb alone on mountains, walk in and out of clouds: stand still and let a huge cloud travel soundlessly down upon you, on a calm day when no wind stirs, and you will know the ghostliness of motion without sound. Not only do the clouds bear down upon you in solemn stillness, but they muffle up and choke the waves of any sound that may be produced within their borders

I remember one day walking through a cloud that stood upon the broad side of Moel Gamelyn; it was a thick, pale grey cloud, inexpressibly solemn and still. But a foot of the mountain road could be seen at a time; one plunged forward among the folds of grey curtains that closed again behind. All at once, without any warning, there started out of the mist a man in a peasant's dress, who led by a cavesson a powerful bay horse. Appearing thus suddenly in that remote deserted region, in such stillness, and wrapped all about in that investiture of grey, man and horse looked the apparition of a dream. The horse snorted and plunged on seeing me and the man saluted me with a hoarse, "Boreu da y chi." The next moment they were out of sight, covered in folds of mist, even the sound of the big horse's hoofs swallowed up and lost.

On issuing out of the cloud, I found that every minutest hair of the rough tweed dress I wore was embroidered in beads of vapour, so small as to be hardly visible. Each one, shining beside its neighbour, was woven for the moment into a silver cloth; the tissue of this cloth might be fragile and evanescent, but it was somehow related to the stars.

And then the wonder of the rain. A colder

river of air touches these fire-chariots that run on silent wheels across our skies, and, behold! a million dropping tears, rainbow carriers, travellers of the sky; or if the cloud is heavy, and large drops are driven slantwise on a rapid wind, we have a million million crystal daggers that strike with a sweet sound on the window-pane; how they can sting, these daggers, the uncovered cheek and neck of the field-labourer know only too well.

The rain is not all. Let but a cold wind lay its miracle-working finger on these soft beaded masses and see what happens: the hidden power awakes, the crystals set; clear gleaming stars, snow wheels, banded feathers, ice flowers, ferns and plumes, in hosts upon hosts fall down in silence; so that to-morrow mere men might walk on a sweet-smelling, snow-white floor, that was the embroidered drapery of the heavens of yesterday.

In spite of all their tricks of dissolution clouds are corporate creatures; else why have they that core of fire underneath those robes of snow? They are brotherly with one another; one cloud by itself in the heavens is lonely and is sure to set sail to the first wind and hurry off to seek out its fellows. Clouds love to roll together in masses; those are heavy days when they stand

tumbling, a mile deep, overhead. On such days one thinks of the fate of the planet Venus, rolled round and round for ever in an undivided veil of silver grey: how pale the flowers must grow in that cloudy land! On such days it is a comfort to think of the upper side of our earthly cloud roof, where floods of golden sunshine roll upon a white floor. What a place for sport, if we could only get there!

Long ago clouds were credited with a strange knowledge and foreknowledge of human affairs. At the time of the plague the people of London used to troop into the fields to watch the skies, which showed affrighting shapes and colours and lights.

"I did see Mr. Christopher Love beheaded on Tower Hill, in a delicate, clear day," writes Aubrey; "about half an hour after his head was struck off the clouds gathered blacker and blacker; and such terrible claps of thunder came that I never heard greater."

I have seen as great and more certain a wonder than this when sitting to watch the tide fill in among the Essex marshes. There in still blue weather the salt blue streams rise noiselessly in the brown channels. On such a day, while watching the quiet spreading of those inland

seas, I have heard the sound of a gun from Shoeburyness suddenly break up the silent peace with its sinister reminder of man's cruelties. I have seen the very daylight obscured by that voice of murder.

Far enough away the clouds must have been resting on distant seas in that still blue weather, and yet they came quickly. To see these formless grey creatures rushing up out of the clear circle of the horizon and to hear presently their deep, woolly-throated bass echoing the sound of the artillery in outrageous symphony, brings to the mind strange food for thought. So may men's enmities distract the heavens, and the clouds themselves fall to war when men are at variance.

XIII

A Brother of St. Francis

WHEN talking to a wise friend a while ago I told her of the feeling of horror which had invaded me when watching a hippopotamus.

"Indeed," said she, "you do not need to go to the hippopotamus for a sensation. Look at a pig! There is something dire in the face of a pig. To think the same power should have created it that created a star!"

Those who love beauty and peace are often tempted to scamp their thinking, to avoid the elemental terrors that bring night into the mind. Yet if the fearful things of life are there, why not pluck up heart and look at them? Better have no Bluebeard's chamber in the mind. Better go boldly in and see what hangs by the wall. So salt, so medicinal is Truth, that even the bitterest draught may be made wholesome to the gentlest soul. So I would recommend anyone who can bear the weight of thinking to leave the flower garden and go down and spend an hour by the pig-stye.

There lies our friend in the sun upon his straw, blinking his clever little eye. Half friendly is his look. (He does not know that I—Heaven forgive me!—sometimes have bacon for breakfast!) Plainly, with that gashed mouth, those dreadful cheeks, and that sprawl of his, he belongs to an older world; that older world when first the mud and slime rose and moved, and, roaring, found a voice: ay, and no doubt enjoyed life, and in harsh and fearful sounds praised the Creator at the sunrising.

To prove the origin of the pig, let him out, and he will celebrate it by making straight for the nearest mud and diving into it. So strange is his aspect, so unreal to me, that it is almost as if the sunshine falling upon him might dissolve him, and resolve him into his original element. But no; there he is, perfectly real; as real as the good Christians and philosophers who will eventually eat him. While he lies there let me reflect in all charity on the disagreeable things I have heard about him.

He is dirty, people say. Nay, is he as dirty (or, at least, as complicated in his dirt) as his brother man can be? Let those who know the dens of London give the answer. Leave the pig to himself, and he is not so bad. He knows his

mother mud is cleansing; he rolls partly because he loves her and partly because he wishes to be clean.

He is greedy? In my mind's eye there rises the picture of human gormandizers, fat-necked, with half-buried eyes and toddling step. How long since the giant Gluttony was slain? or does he still keep his monstrous table d'hôte?

The pig pushes his brother from the trough? Why, that is a commonplace of our life. There is a whole school of so-called philosophers and political economists busied in elevating the pig's shove into a social and political necessity.

He screams horribly if you touch him or his share of victuals? I have heard a polite gathering of the best people turn senseless and rave at a mild suggestion of Christian Socialism. He is bitter-tempered? God knows, so are we. He has carnal desires? The worst sinner is man. He will fight? Look to the underside of war. He is cruel? Well, boys do queer things sometimes. For the rest, read the blacker pages of history; not as they are served up for the schoolroom by private national vanity, but after the facts.

If a cow or a sheep is sick or wounded and the pig can get at it, he will worry it to death? So does tyranny with subject peoples.

He loves to lie in the sun among his brothers, idle and at his ease? Ay, but suppose this one called himself a lord pig and lay in the sun with a necklace of gold about his throat and jewels in his ears, having found means to drive his brethren (merry little pigs and all) out of the sun for his own benefit, what should we say of him then?

No; he has none of our cold cunning. He is all simplicity. I am told it is possible to love him. I know a kindly Frenchwoman who takes her pig for an airing on the sands of St. Michel-en-Grève every summer afternoon. Knitting, she walks along, and calls gaily and endearingly to the delighted creature; he follows at a word, gambolling with flapping ears over the ribs of sand, pasturing on shrimps and seaweed while he enjoys the salt air.

Clearly, then, the pig is our good little brother, and we have no right to be disgusted at him. Clearly our own feet are planted in the clay. Clearly the same Voice once called to our ears while yet unformed. Clearly we, too, have arisen from that fearful bed, and the slime of it clings to us still. Cleanse ourselves as we may, and repenting, renew the whiteness of our garments, we and the nations are for ever slipping back into the native element. What a fearful command the

"Be ye perfect" to earth-born creatures, but half-emerged, the star upon their foreheads bespattered and dimmed! But let us (even those of us who have courage to know the worst of man) take heart. In the terror of our origin, in the struggle to stand upon our feet, to cleanse ourselves, and cast an eye heavenward, our glory is come by. The darker our naissance, the greater the terrors that have brooded round that strife, the more august and puissant shines the angel in man.

PAGES FROM LIFE

I.—THE BLACK OX

XIV

The Black Ox

AN old country woman once said to me of a wild young girl, "Ah, she's gay enough; the black ox hasn't trod on her foot yet," meaning that neither care nor grief nor pain had touched her.

I remember when I was a child, a two-year-old red bullock once trod on my foot. I remember hopping round and round in an agony, holding the injured foot in my two hands. No one who has not felt the tread of that split hoof can imagine the pain it gives. Hence the proverb, which must be old, and very old. The mysterious black ox comes out of the twilight of the untravelled future; darker himself than the twilight, he is on you before you are aware: and, lo! you who were but a moment before so calm and

dignified, are hopping in a very ecstasy of anguish. Not less ridiculous, either, are the inner gesticulations of the punished creature upon whom the inmost woe has fallen. Watch him when he thinks himself alone, and you will convict him of sighs and mutterings, of wringing hands or a clenched fist, sure index to the anguish of the spirit within.

Such is the way fate serves us; turned out as we are upon this planet, willy-nilly, with a body nicely adjusted to feel every variety of pain and disease when coming roughly in contact with hard matter; provided, too, with a whole inner apparatus tuned to suffer under the asperities of life.

It is ridiculous to be set up like this, against one's will, a mark for pain. It is exactly as though one were hung up helpless like a Marconi receiver, ready tempered to receive sharp, quivering messages out of the unknown. The body is far more easily protected than the spirit. It is generally possible to avoid physical pain by using our knowledge of natural law. A far harder question is, how to avoid grief, the pain of the soul?

I know by heart all the good people's arguments about pain being good for every one, that it

means growth and teaches sympathy, and so on. But to-day I do not like their growing pains. I wish to be rid of them. I am annoyed because it seems to me we are thrown at each fresh vital emotion into a new atmosphere where the art of balance has to be learned all over again. Of what value are the long-ago cries of the child to the grown girl? Of what use is the experience of lover's grief to the wrung heart of the mother? Nothing prepares one for the acuteness of the successive experiences of life. And the witnesses of our predestinate suffering are the shameful watercourses of the eye; sealed or unsealed, those fountains are always there, waiting the day, the moment; they are ready for it; from our birth-night they have known it on the way—that moment when their salt and bitter taste shall convict us of our woe.

"Why did He give us tears?" asked a very small creature once, when talking of God and the judgments. Why, ah, why, we ask ourselves at times; why did He give us tears?

XV

The Blow

MOST of us remember what pride we, as children, used to take in our bruises—how we showed them to each other, and how, the worse they were, the better we were pleased. As far as colour was concerned, purple, black, blue, green, and yellow were valuable in a descending scale. Even now some of us are not above feeling a sort of pride in a good bruise, well earned.

But no one was ever yet proud of a bruised spirit. "I have a friend, but my sorrow has no friend," says the sick-hearted. If we do bring ourselves to show our spiritual bruises to another, we do so with a certain sense of shame, and ten to one but we wish we hadn't done it afterwards. Yet why should this be so? The pathology of a bruised spirit and a bruised shin are very much alike. One finds out that.

There is the same shock and pain following the blow, the same ache that grows slowly less troublesome, to fade gradually away at last.

The Blow

Does not unkindness make the heart actually sore? Who has not felt that terrible pain in the breast that follows the shock of grief? Who has not known that confused waking from sleep, before realization comes, when the mind cries within, "Oh, what is the matter? What has happened to me? What a pain is in my heart!" —exactly as one might say, "Oh, how sore my shin is! I wonder how I have hurt it!"

The bodily bruise is really there. You are sure of it, because you can see it. The pain of the spirit is also there, deep-seated. It is none the less really there because you cannot see it. If the bodily pain is severe enough your mind will be affected. You will cease to be interested in quite a number of things. If the pain of mind is severe enough, your body will be affected; you will cease to take an interest even in your victuals.

You cannot argue either of these pains away. We all try to do so—we conceive it to be our duty to do so, when the pain is mental. Ignorantly we worry and scold ourselves, trying to shake it off, as one may see a dog snap at his wounds. It would be just as sensible to sit down and scold a hurt knee, for instance, as a hurt mind. As there is bodily inflammation, so there is mental inflammation. This is a sort of moral

indignity which those who wake in the night have to suffer from. Their thoughts are continually agitated like a roused swarm of bees flying in foolish, meaningless circles round and round the centre of their pain. This is an exact parallel to the physical symptoms. Then it is that the ordinary heathen falls into his worst rages. He longs to pass on his suffering to his nearest and weakest inferior. In the old days the powerful ones of the earth used to lave their moral inflammations in the blood and tears of their slaves.

There is a light, quick way of dealing with these small sprites of life that fly at you like mosquitoes in the night—laugh at them. Laugh at yourself. What a panacea humour and good humour together will make! When you are suffering from wounded vanity or rabid egotism, if you can only set these merry ones going you are cured in a moment. They give you mastery over almost anything. Hold yourself up to the light—a little mannikin! See yourself dance when the strings are pulled! Laugh at yourself with a good round Ha! ha! ha! Soon after you will be asleep, to wake in the morning half cured of your aches and pains.

But the great pains, ah, the great pains;

laughter will not do there. Rather sit quiet and recollect yourself. Discover the boundaries and extent of your suffering. Say to yourself, "Such and such a disaster has befallen me. Such and so great is my pain. To-day it is severe, perhaps to-morrow or next day it will be better. But I shall be a very poor creature for a time. I shall be wearing a bandage and shrinking from contacts."

The wise sufferer will soon find out that a very fine unguent can be composed of the conscious exercise of patience, of prayer, and of the will to suffer with decency.

But it is hard work, very hard work. How the flesh quakes beneath the blow! We have all seen it some time or another—seen the pale, quivering face and red-rimmed eyes, the beautiful eyes from which those strange rivers of grief pour down; felt the fluttering heart, and the sob, and the hand of grief that clutches so hard.

Of those twins, the body and the soul, the body is the weaker of the two. Indeed, one has seen pain of mind kill a body quite. It is harder for pain of body to kill the mind. The mind is the more indestructible stuff of the two. In sober truth I have known large natures who have found a sort of queer joy in suffering. So

attuned were they to the eternal harmonies that when struck the heaviest, the deeper and the sweeter was the response. Energized by pain, the answer to the blow was a song, even many songs, some of which were beautiful.

But they felt it; oh yes, they felt it. If you kick the shins of a saint, will they not turn blue?

XVI

Energeia

THERE is a subtle essence that animates young veins. Perhaps it is the most formidable fact in creation, this principle that sends the branched horns shooting from the head of the stag, that curls the hair on the forehead of the bull, that sets the handsome rams to slay each other in the field, and touches with a dark finger the lips of the youth. No one who has watched the gentle child turn in a few years into the half-sullen, sometimes dangerous, youth, who had felt the leaping pulse of male adolescence, can pretend to ignore or underrate its force.

It often happens that in our traffic with animals we come upon mixed parables and parodies of our own queer dispositions. Yesterday it chanced that being mounted on a safe pony, well out of danger, I undertook to drive two rams, newly shorn, to some distant fields. They were desperate fine fellows, fat and in fine spirits, with large and heavy horns that curled again about their

heads—models for an outlandish lady's head-dress. For some four paces they would go quietly, then, moved by a common impulse, they would bounce across and clash horns together right in front of the horse's feet—a few quiet paces more, and then bang at each other again. Like stripped gladiators they glared upon each other with their yellow eyes, all the way along. Glad as I was to be rid of them, their necks still unbroke, I had to admire their spirits. There is something extraordinarily engaging in such eruptions of vital energy. It is not only nursemaids that run to see soldiers on the march. We all take delight in the lovely barbarians, dressed in their well-made clothes, crashing on their drums, and apparently ready for anything. We are dimly conscious of the dark halo that surrounds them, of the rough air of tragedy that sets them forth. They are the servants of the Goddess Energeia and her more terrible sister, Ananke.

They, as well as our brothers the rams, are driven by a force they never question—the same force that has sown the heavens with countless millions of stars and thrown down the seeds of plants in such abundance that they push shoulder to shoulder in a green hosting all the earth over. It is the force that sends man out

into the unknown, that makes for battle and struggle and adventure. Had it been less powerful, could men have succeeded in conquering the wild earth, with all the brutal, bitter work there has been and is still to do?

Even the cruelty which is inherent in the young male of the human race, and which has made him the terror of creation, has had its blessed result in the slaying of fear for his own sort. He has put death or slavery or fear on all; but in doing so he is liberating his kind.

See the gelded horse come in from his work, his head hanging down, his flanks black with sweat! Look at the heavy, dull cow in the field; once the yearly renewed anguish of her defeated motherhood is over, not a country child fears her. What has she in common with her fierce sister of the pampas, slayer of horse and man, running in freedom with her calf at her foot?

Watch the little creatures not worth enslaving and not yet killed—they go bathed in fear! The shining birds turn their necks this way and that at every hop. The field vole, the hare, and the rabbit habitually run as we might before an earthquake or a tidal wave. There is not a mother-beast anywhere who has not told her young of man and his doings.

Not so very long ago man himself suffered continually from fear. He went "his beard on his shoulder," and the woman and the child were nearly always in a fright. Now at last he begins to find himself in a fair way to a rescue from many of the cruelties of life. The next step will be when he shall have become so disgusted with his own bedevilment that wars will cease.

Then and not till then will this tremendous fellow begin to get hold of ideas and put all his energies and the great forces at his command into the working of them out. The idea has scarcely had a chance yet. Hitherto the mysterious power of life has pushed man onward. He has been driven as the sea bird is driven by the storm. But the day is coming when he shall have learnt the measure and the direction of the force which impels him. He will quit his battling; he will begin to use the strength of the heavenly tides, spreading his full sails, and curving his high prows to new airs, sweeter waters. No longer will his strength be spent in concocting villainies that confound himself. No longer will haphazard and low cunning build his hideous cities and rule the delicate lands. Great, great will be his powers. Great they are already, though but half intelligent

as yet. He has still to discover the supreme and awful energies of love. Will he find them out while there is yet time to bless himself? Before the moon's fate darkens the meadows of the earth?

XVII

Thistle and Thorn

THE spine and the thorn are always to be seen, fast enough in their places, if we happen to be in the mood to look for them.

There in the hedge is a ferocious hawthorn bush, garnished with spines an inch and a half long, sharp, tough and handsome. Beside it is the bramble; farther away, just a foot or two, an arched, swinging rose branch, a veritable wreath of thorns. In the ditch below live the thistles and the bitter, stinging nettles. How inevitable and natural do they appear in this violent world—dagger shape, flame shape, spear shape, figuring and fore-figuring elemental savageries.

A thousand times one has turned one's eyes away from the stinging, piercing faculties of life—drawing light veils across the face, pulling close the comfortable silken shawls, looking always on the flower, turning always from the thorn. At last comes a day when the bitter wind blows, when the red bubble of the rose is dropped from

the tree, when the leaves are scattered and only the thorns remain—too openly there to be disbelieved or overlooked.

On that day we look about us with changed eyes. See that old dog with the bitter grin, snarling, ready to fight, his grey hairs bristling up at a moment's notice! It is he that knows the world. Hark to the bull's roar! the fighting stallion's neigh! Look at the terrible shape of the lightning like a bayonet stroke across the sky.

Even in the sunlight one feels a savage power: from what a terror of suspended fire it proceeds; think of the awful plunging of those fiery gulfs, of the jetting fire-fountains that shoot out a hundred miles. In the black bar below the seven colours lives the force that draws forth the thorn from the bough; that drags out the intemperate rage in man till it finds vent in a voice so mighty that it shakes the very mountains and shocks the air.

And not the air only: the evil intentions of that deep note shock the inmost soul of man. How frightfully it makes known the hidden wickedness that is so often plastered over with a smile.

In the thorn there is none of that evil intention.

How harmless the thorns of the brier pierce the air; how peacefully the wind sings through the thistle. The nettles are comfortable together in the ditch, never hurting their kind. Man alone in his besotted fierceness destroys himself. But from that very terror springs a hope. The giver and the receiver of wounds are one. In the pouring out of his own blood may lie his purification.

One day, looking upon those bloody fountains, he will reconsider himself. He will act, he will plan, he will create. Angels and archangels looking down, will be amazed at his handsome doings. Then perhaps for good and all the splendour of the rose will return upon the brier, and the crystal and the silver redress the thorn.

XVIII

Acheron-in-Bow

IT was long ago decided, by those who ought to know, that the souls of the lost—men, women, and children—wander in multitudes so vast that they resemble a moving forest on the farther shores of the cold waters of death. The eternal air trembles with their sighs; in the dim twilight, pale spirit faces appear for a moment, to disappear in the ranks of the endless procession. Others are tossed moaning on a black wind that gives them no rest for ever.

I remember one day when it appeared to me that instead of taking train to the East End of London I must have taken Charon's boat to the farther shore of the Acheron. I had to visit a poor woman who lived in Bow, the mother of eight children, deserted by her husband. I found her in a cellar, making men's shirts for the Colonies at desperate speed, while the little ones ran round in the half-dark. (Ah me, those cellar-born!) She sat in a patch of dim, foggy light

cast down from a tiny window, ceiling-high; yellow, haggard, a picture of desperate diligence, bent over her machine that whirred like the wind. She could not stop her work for an instant, but worked on with lightning fingers—while she spoke to me in a muffled voice.

"The ware'us people is awful 'ard," so ran the burden of her trouble. "Tenpence-halfpenny for making a dozen of men's shirts. I must find my own needles, and they fine me as well; a penny for this and a penny for that. The ware'us people is awful 'ard. Look at my book," she said, nodding towards a battered account-book that lay near the machine. "You will see all the fines put down. Tenpence-halfpenny I never get."

I looked at the book: I wish now I had taken a copy of it. Those dry entries, those docked halfpence cried out from the page, accused all our civilization, all our Christianity, announced the bitterest tyranny the world has ever seen. While I turned the pages, every now and then a child's face would appear out of the gloom, staring up at me, pale, dirty, pinched with hunger; shadows that I might not comfort, no more than Dante could comfort the fluttering spirits that spoke to him out of the twilight of the infernal valleys.

"Now," thought I, as I went away, "I have seen the lowest depths of human misery. I have seen the London slave. The London savage has his joys. This poor slave has none."

But I had something yet to learn: this woman who made shirts for an average of three farthings was, though I did not then realize it, an exemplary person, faithful, respectable, unsparing of herself in ceaseless labour. The cellar, though I did not know it, was, for a London cellar, clean. The mere chance of happening to lose my way on leaving it made me acquainted with the fact that between the London savage and the virtuous London slave lies another class—slaves also, but not at all virtuous, and by so much the more abased.

Thinking of the whirring machine and the tell-tale account-book I missed my way. I went into the wrong house and, going upstairs without finding out my mistake, tapped at a door. It opened, and a vile air came forth like a solid wall. I backed before it, half-choked. I could see it; it was thick and yellow, and in a moment I was helpless with nausea. A withered brownish skeleton of a man with a boot on one hand and some instrument in the other asked me what I wanted. Inside I could see three or four other

people sitting in the yellow fog, all diligently working with their hands at something. I could see within plainly enough through the mist; I saw the black rags on the bed, the vermin running on the walls. The man stood back and I tried to enter, honestly tried; but to breast that air was an impossibility. Like a coward I turned and fled;—ill, more than half poisoned by that yellow fog.

As I went home along those terrible streets, stone-bound in their stupidity (oh, how could the men who built them have so forgotten the little children as not to leave them one thread of green?), I seemed to hear some heavenly influence go by like a wind of music, complaining that it might not enter and comfort those choked and leaden hearts.

These people have no more rest than the tormented spirits of the dark valleys; and how refreshing, compared with the airs of Bow, sounds the black wind of Dante's *Inferno*.

XIX

The Servant of Beasts

THERE are moments which occur to us all when thoughts which have been lurking in the mind imperfectly conceived suddenly start into life, like Athene from the brain of Zeus, empowered to inspire the actions of men. During years the mind's eyes will glide ignorantly over those scenes of the outer world which are the material of thought, till, on a day, the whole is changed, for one wiser than ourselves has looked forth.

I shall never forget the October day that brought me a new seeing of the life that men who labour must everywhere live. On that day I first perceived the strangeness of the life led by human creatures the world over in the service of animals: the high everywhere serving the low. It was as though I had found the angel Gabriel in my kitchen.

It had happened that after a long day among the Epynt hills with one of those rare companions

who know how to be silent, sunset found us uncertain of the way. Hurrying down the rough mountain-side, it was with a sense of relief that we reached at last a rude stone wall that proclaimed the first enclosure from the open mountain. Finding some projecting stones that served the purpose of a stile, we were soon standing in this first field.

It might have been the first field of the world. The very fact of the surrounding stone wall seemed to mark the ground as more inhospitable than the mountain-side. Here, to-night, as a thousand years ago, heather bells shone undisturbed in the evening light, and the bracken was five and six feet high in the shelter of the wall.

Feeling more secure now that the borders of civilization had been reached, we slackened our pace, and sauntered the narrow track that turned and winded in its course to avoid the hillocks and the stouter heather bushes.

In the centre of the slope was a small quarry evidently disused since many years. Its edges were protected by a paling of crazy-looking stakes, each one of which bristled at a different angle.

The stillness of the absolutely remote lay over

the field. The only sound was the barely audible hoof-fall of three red heifers that wandered up and down.

A moment more and we caught sight of a man's figure standing by the quarry's edge. He was perfectly motionless, and appeared almost gigantic. His clothes were pale in colour and hung loosely upon him; his shoulders were stooped. His heavy hands were quiet at his sides, while he seemed absorbed in watching the heifers as they rambled to and fro.

When we were quite near he slowly turned his face upon us; it was a large face, vacant, silent, with pale eyes, tanned cheeks and forehead. His mouth was open, and from the lower lip, beastlike, the slaver ran down upon his golden beard. His face and his whole figure expressed the solemn dignity of a solemn beast.

Twice we spoke and asked the way and received no answer. The third time, with a lifted arm and a few guttural words, he pointed out the path which led downwards through his own farm-dwelling that lay some distance below. But he never stirred a foot: when we turned back to look at him, he was still standing in the sunset light in his pale clothes watching the heifers.

Passing by his farm we saw that the low buildings ran round three sides of a square courtyard paved with irregular slabs of red sandstone. The evening sun shone red on the pink rock, making the surrounding greenness appear ten times green by contrast. Silent cows stood about in a dirty byre. Not even a bird sang.

Next day we asked some of the country-folk about him. "He is a very harmless man," they said. "His people have always been at that farm. He lives with a sister and his nephew. His people have always been at that farm."

This man whom we had seen was not a type of the people themselves, who were hardy and in a degree intelligent. But he appeared to me to stand for a symbol of something, I knew not what. His figure haunted me: I could not be rid of his remembered image. In imagination I followed his down-sitting and his up-rising and that of his fathers before him for hundreds of years. I watched attentively the life of those wild lands where heather and bracken follow the plough, where unprofitable fields are tilled by the silent labourer, where the beasts are tended by their bond-servants from before the dawn till late dark.

It was not till I returned to the city that I

understood the meaning which that solitary figure had for me.

One day I seemed to see him by the quarry again, watching his beasts, and grown to their likeness.

There he stands, I thought, a new Atlas. Those great shoulders may well be stooped, for upon them rests the ultimate burden of a formidable civilization.

Upon the back of him, the tiller of the soil, the bond-servant of the beasts, rests the weight of our cities and their multitudes. The greater grow our cities, the harder grows the toil by which they are fed. There is no time nor place for joy in our villages when the dust of the motor-cars chokes the children's play. Where are our Maypoles and our wassailings and our country-dances? Joy is fled to the cities.

There gaiety in all her colours may be found; and there pleasure may be poised on what may seem the airiest of gilt pinnacles; but they are really bearing heavily all the while on the bent shoulders of this new Atlas who stands lonely in his fields.

XX

The Red Tenant

THE human heart is nearly as old as the hills. A strange inheritance, it has been handed down from father to son through the ages. In the breast of man it sits throned, bold, eager, tempestuous, the ruler of youth. It has a life of its own. It will beat in spite of us for joy or grief or passion. It is impossible for us to still it by a wish. It knows the old way we must go: the old path our fathers have trodden before us.

The young maiden cannot translate the longings of her heart. In all ignorance and innocence she obeys its promptings. The older people about her see and understand; but she herself is not the least aware why the unquiet tenant of her bosom bade her put that rose in her hair.

The youth, too, is ignorant often of what road he is taking. So wild is his bosom's inhabitant that it seems to him as though he carried within him a core of fire: he is driven this way and

that, blindly seeking and desiring what his heart bids him.

In youth the heart laughs at the will. It takes its own way and suffers no control. It has a measured song, unheard for the most part and unheeded, which when quickened by passion rouses into tumult fit to drown the world. How mighty is the strength of its desire, is only understood by those whose desire has been snatched from them. The disappointed heart has actually been known to die within the bosom: and its companions, the brain and the will, have died soon after.

When the heart has its way and all goes well with it, what fire and life fill the house! When the heart sits desolate there is heavy pain and weight in the breast, the face is pale, the limbs slow and dull.

Then it is that the wise will must step down from its lofty house, to lift up and admonish the fainting heart. *Sursum corda* is a great word. I have known soul and will together come down and take a death-stricken heart, and raising it up, renew its broken strength, and show it a fair and unattainable image of immortal beauty upon which to fix new desires.

A lifetime is scarcely long enough for a man

to learn to comprehend and guide the motions of his own heart, this darling and wonderful sister of his brain, whose warnings safeguard him, who teaches him the joy and splendour of life. It is best that the two powers should take counsel together, neither the cold brain overschooling the eager heart so that it sits governed and unsatisfied, robbed of its right joys; nor the wild heart mastering the brain to its befoolment.

Let the two form an equal friendship and run freely together in desire and thought: they have each of them an older knowledge, and, being counselled by the eternities, are wiser than we.

PAGES FROM LIFE

II.—ARACHNE

XXI

Pleasure

IF ever there were an arrant hussy it is pretty Pleasure. She is a bad mistress; a man could not have a worse. But, strangely enough, she is also the cleverest of handmaids.

Harsh discipline seems to bring out all that is best in her. See her now as a servant, how lovely she is! Her sun-coloured locks are falling discreetly, her gown of sky-colour is simple: her hand is ready and clever: she waits with a will: the indomitable creature will go laughing through the day: she has a thousand sweet looks and flashing smiles. Pleasure will get up and open the windows of a morning, bake the bread, and sweep the house, and everything she touches in a moment will be sweet and in perfection. Abroad she is the best of all companions. The

sky grows a deeper sapphire as she fleets before, her locks on the wind; she beckons from the margin of the wood with the white finger of enchantment.

Indeed, I have met her in the strangest places: I have met her with the cold rain upon her cheek crossing a lonely moor where the heather was stark and black. I have met her at the poor man's table seated among his babes. I have seen her in a student's room—a lovely sight, her elbow on her knee, quiet and still, entirely translated by thought.

That way she is sober and good; altogether what she is designed to be, the sweetener of life. But woo her as a mistress and the hussy grows a Mænad. See her now with pale cheeks and glittering eyes, with grasping hands, snatching ever more and more greedily; and as she snatches she casts behind her, and the more she enjoys, the paler grows her cheek; now she riots, and now she sleeps away the day. If you were to part that dazzling robe of hers and lay a hand upon her bosom, the coldness of her icy heart would freeze you to the bone. She sneers at grief. She lifts her chin against labour. She turns her back on pain; till, grown harder, she begins to find enjoyment in the sight of it.

Pleasure

Rampant at last and increased in strength, she becomes a terror. I tell you, before now, pleasure and her ill-deeds have drowned a nation in blood. Ay, and she will do the like again, if she be not better controlled.

XXII

The Sensitive House

THE walls of a house, the mere wood and plaster, are not so insensitive as we suppose. It is the way now to laugh at the idea of haunted houses, but I, for one, believe in them with all the nerves I possess. Houses have a queer trick of telling tales about the people that have lived in them. Imagine an old lion's den: even if it had been long uninhabited; even if the wind had gone in and out of it for fifty years untainted; even if you hid the bones and tidied up the threshold;—what message do you suppose it would bring to the heart of the lamb that had wandered in? The creature would flee for its life, and that night it would disturb its mother with bad dreams. So there are houses that tell our delicate senses that rogues and worse have inhabited there. There are rooms that breathe of death. There are walls that hint at violence. There are hearthstones that whisper of shame still unconsumed.

We have all known houses of a less ominous but not less decided character; vulgar houses, where the whole edifice reeks, and the very mirrors are infected; cross houses where the tables and chairs have an irritated look, and the flowers in the vases are nervous, and seem as if they had been quarrelling just before you entered the room; dull, depressed houses, where the pattern fades along the walls, and the horrible iron flowers that ornament the stoves wear a mourning of blacklead.

Since it is such an open secret that houses have the habit of taking on the character of their inhabitants, may it not be that they have their own ways of laying up a record of deeds done inside their walls?

Take a house where a tragedy has happened, who knows but that somewhere may be registered the report, the cry: and that incidentally some similar vibration may bring out echoes of sleeping sound? Or that the sudden flash, the bright blood stream, may not be photographed on some tiny surface, and remain to hint at the past to future generations?

The custom of house-warmings, house-purifications, of the consecration of churches and churchyards, proves that we have some such instinct about

buildings and their characters. An appeal to every sense is made by the procession of priests and singing-boys, by solemn chanting in each chamber, by sprinkling of blessed water and spreading of incense fumes, by sound of a bell and benediction. Thereafter, if inhabitants or passers-by were disturbed by unchancy vibrations of sound or light, it would be the echoes of music, of the footfall of the priest, the waving of his garments that would recur to the memory of ear and eye.

Do not tell me that houses are incapable of sanctification; it is not form alone that makes this or that cathedral venerable; it is the thousand thousand harmonies of the soul uttered therein that have so melodized the stones. You need but let an old bucket drop in an Abbey, and the echoes, with their overtones, will fly from arch to arch, and rush chiming to the roof like a flock of doves; and all this simply from ingrained habit of holiness!

But we could not exist for every day in the solemn airs of the cathedral. We want a more lyric atmosphere in our houses; not a trumpery gew-gawed atmosphere, but one such as the old Italians loved—large spaces within, enclosed by noble line; colour and beautiful form upon the

walls; only the necessary in furniture; plenty of light and air; plenty of music; a table of fine shape simply spread with bread and salad and oil, fruits and honey and a flask of wine. And what need for more? All the gracious elements of life are here. Time and again I have dreamed, and always in the same way, of the house that I long for. In this dream I awake seated, in strange garments, on a white marble floor, leaning against one pillar of a wide white hall. On the right stretch the ranks of pillars, white, with shadows of grey. On the left is a small open court with a sculptured fountain at play in the middle; about and above it blue air, water ascending and descending, and translucent stone, meet and mix in the dazzling sunshine. Sometimes in this dream I stand and see the woman seated in the strange coloured garments: sometimes I sit at the pillar's foot, and I myself am she. This dream is always accompanied by a sense of bliss; some dreaming instinct seems to be aware that a point of elemental joy is abroad on that air, like the star that glides and changes in the depths of the blue star-sapphire.

XXIII

Arachne, or the Housekeeper

WITH the ceaseless growth of populations, life grows less and less kindly for the woman and the child. The happy village life, with its freedoms, its play-places for the children, its crafts and its songs, has gradually decayed away. From causes deep-rooted in the appetites of mankind and common to all races, the people are driven more and more into cities. There the stony ways under foot, the closed houses like barren cliffs on either hand, the factory walls and chimneys for ever multiplying, the strange machinery of iron and steel—look grimly on the woman and the child. The monster *greed*, who lies at the bottom of every human heart, steps out boldly under the sun, clothed in armour of stone and steel, defying Nature, kindness, beauty, art, handicraft, and all the fair simplicities that constitute the natural life.

Since our conditioning is everywhere rapidly changing, since, among the noisy, pushing

multitudes, the weakest not only go to the wall (as our proverb has it), but even down to the pit —the case of woman needs to be newly stated. She must know in what to-day consists her virtue and her strength; what are her faculties, which way lies her path, what she shall desire, what she shall taste and what refuse.

Very many are the offices and faculties of women; we can hardly count her different guises, so many does she wear in this tumult of increasing life. We recognize her as woman, the keeper of the house; woman, the people's servant; woman, the labourer; woman, the industrial slave; woman, the artist and follower of the crafts; woman, the healer; woman, the worshipper of Athene, mistress of all knowledges; woman, the priestess; woman, the counsellor, mother of mankind; woman, daughter of folly; woman, daughter of hell.

Perhaps in all her manifold impersonations, woman is most completely herself in her immemorial office as keeper of the house.

Realizing, as we can, the immemorial and elemental type of the housekeeper, we may consider afresh what are her functions, what her material of life, to what degree of honour she is born.

Apart from the particular faculty of any artist, the degree of honour he receives is proportionate to the beauty and permanence of his material. The older artists relied for their ultimate greatness of reputation on the purity and lasting qualities of the colours they used. If their work had soon faded away, so would their honour.

The housekeeper works in the most perishable material of all: it dies under her hand at night and must be renewed each morning. For builders in the frail and insubstantial, the housekeeper and Arachne, the spider, might make a match of it. The spider is incessantly spinning a web from her own inner store, constantly renewing it, constantly seeing her labour swept away. The housekeeper's work, scarcely ended when she lies down at night, begins afresh with every dawn. She works in such material as water and fire, flour and soap, needles and thread, roses, and the broom. She is the link between man and the eternal simplicities. Of her completed works, some of the most important are eatable and meant to be demolished, for she is bond-woman to the appetites of her house-mates. She fights one long pitched battle with decay and many-legged depredators. But her enemy of enemies is dust: dust that for ever rises in the

footsteps of man. Out of doors sweet Mother Nature, who abhors dust, lays her live green carpet wherever she possibly can, and securely binds it down. When her green carpet fails, then the true terrors of dust are seen; we get the charging dust-storm a mile high, rattling like giant artillery and slaying all before it. Within doors, but for the cleansing hand of the housekeeper, life would be hideous. The labours of Sisyphus are hers — the enemy dust, slain yesterday, rises again to-day, and will rise again to-morrow.

With such materials and such labour what pictures does our housekeeper create—pictures to hang for ever in the memory of those who behold them. We have all seen them; they are common to every nation. The sun at the open window, crossing the floor, and the straight-made bed. The child's face at the morning meal. The flower slowly opening in the vase. The lamp shining at night. The voice of welcome in the ready-opened door. The thrill of music in the house. The food fairly laid upon the board. Elements of life, every one of them, perfect and eternal, beautiful as art.

Although this task of hers is that of a priestess and comparable to the work done by Mother

Nature herself, it is not always seen so by men, nor even by herself. When called into the great market of the world to show her finished work, because of which she should have honour, behold, her hands are empty: there is nothing to show: she is of little account: her face is tired and her hair is grey. She has grown wise through the touch and feel of things, but she does not express her wisdom, as those do who have grown wise mainly from books. She stands silent, her voice unheard in the world's uproar.

Yet if you but stop a moment to consider that wholesome figure, she will presently appear to you to be significant: there is something there of the priestess, something of mystery and dignity: is she not an artist in life? Her art is the weaving of the indestructible out of the destructible. Out of such material as garments and draperies, comely meals, renewals of the bright hearth where love sits and warms herself, good counsel and the touch of the restoring hand, she moulds and stays up human life. She is the life-giver and the life-preserver.

You see, in that comely figure of the good housekeeper who steals neglected into the world's market-place, who is unpaid, and taken for granted, there hides an artist of rare achieve-

ment. Like Arachne, the spider, she has woven out of her very vitals a web of life. Here and there may be knots and flaws and tangles, yet in spite of them it will be found an acceptable piece of work; golden threads run through it; and when it is laid down as a carpet for the feet of the Lord of Life, it shines well enough and is on the whole worthy to take his footprints.

XXIV

Rings

TO-DAY is my day for thinking in circles. The field of my thought is round and gathers infinite circles within itself; sounds come to me as winged balls, feathered, coloured, with quivering borders. The windows through which I look out on creation, those two strangely ringed pupils of the eye, are round. Through them I see the round sun shining in the high half-circle that bounds me, carrying my thought up and away to the endless circular dances of endless millions of balls. I think of the whirling stars throwing off rings that become other balls; and then a strange thought strikes me of the round cities of men.

These seething, whirling circles of life must be governed by the same laws that govern the stars —the same laws but much more complicated; because, wrapping and permeating the visible life of the cities, whirls and seethes invisibly a distilled essence—human thought, reflective,

creative, and constructive, revolving upon, about, and above the material of life.

Turning and turning in this tumult-filled circle, life and thought are evolved at their hottest and keenest. Here the graspings of desire are most furious and insatiate, the imponderable essence of thought is most pungent and diffused. Out of the centre of this whirlpool it is that fresh forms of life, material and spiritual, will arise: the strong things, the bright things of life will break out and shine; nay, they do break out and shine every day. In the same way thought will whirl and turn; then flying out wide, it will choose one pleasantest spot after another, will drop down and make its home there. So the little round cities, the clean little white cities, the painted cities, will rise up glowing with new life; new because a good thought, and a deep thought has planted their foundations.

There can be no beauty without clean thought at the back of it. Love of hearth and kindred will give you a natural and handsome house-place. Veneration and love of the gods will give you a noble and exalted form in building. Cunning and cleverness will build sties for their fellow-men and defile the face of the earth for their own advantage.

Out of the old passion of woman for the child-hood of the race, out of the revived veneration for the god in man, new cities, a new art of life, will arise. Alas, that I shall not live to see them, the new little cities, rings upon rings of snow-white, of rainbow colour, and green!

PAGES FROM LIFE

III.—THE LITTLE HARPER

XXV

In Secret

NATURE always takes care to hide away the unfinished thing. Not even the air or the light or the rain is allowed to come at them. Look how the small live creature is wrapped up in the mother's womb. Look at the thousand-shaped cases and shell-like coverings that protect the seed and the bud. How nobly does the tree stand in winter holding to the pale sunlight its million brown buds, like tapers still unlit; how steadily, how very secretly it matures the promise of the spring!

There is some instinct that warns us that the same law holds good with the small secret growths of the mind; a sort of reluctance teaches us that the purposes of the mind are best matured in silence. There is a full spring in secret resolu-

tions. When I hear talking about the great things a man, even an eminent man, is going to do, I say to myself, "He will die first: those great things will not be done," for one finds that an impulse gets relief in the telling as well as in the doing; as though some leakage of moral force occurred by way of mere words.

I suppose that the legitimate relief of impulse is in action. There is a sort of cruelty in prematurely exposing the little airy something, the small live spirit that longs for its natural dress and embodiment.

Open a bud upon a branch and look within: there is the prefigurement of spring, stem and leaf and flower, hidden all from sight. But when you have looked you may break off the bud and throw it away: it will never blossom; it has seen the light too soon.

XXVI

The Squirrel on the Nut Tree

ONE evening my friend and I sat by a winter fire.

"Do you remember that summer we spent at Aber?" he asked suddenly. Instantly in thought I was standing on a flat seashore, looking over an immense sweep of sand to the distant sea, beyond which Puffin Island and the coast of Anglesea shone in the sun. I remembered the sand-pipers that used to come there, and in the same moment I saw them running over the sand. I remembered a tiny cuttle-fish we had caught there, and there it was again on my hand, a little fantastically shaped thing that you would say was made out of rainbow-tinted water. While I was looking at the cuttle-fish, my friend spoke again.

"Do you remember the Squirrel on the nut tree?" he asked. I felt puzzled, and looked out to sea: to the remembered sea, I should say. This was Aber, but where was the Squirrel? Then I recollected there were some woods some-

where. Within my memory I turned about, feeling my friend was waiting for me a long distance away. I remembered the woods were on a rising mountain slope near the house; so I turned, and on those wonderful feet of thought that can travel all day and never be tired or touched by the mire of the way, I passed up from the shore, crossed the railway line, flew a mile by a winding way that I recalled perfectly as I went, after an absence of years. Reaching the house, I knew in a minute the way to the woods; they clothed the mountain that rose up behind the house. Remembering the whole way, in a second I was up and among the trees. Ah, there was the fair green mossed path and my friend standing waiting for me: and there was the nut tree and the squirrel, so pretty. Once again I was standing to watch. The tree grew on the bank below us, and the squirrel fancied himself quite safe and alone. He was a big one, golden brown and white, carrying his tail down. I never saw any creature so thorough. He was searching for nuts; he began at the bottom and worked every branch of the tree, keeping his nose down and running out on each branch in succession to the very tip. The whole tree rustled and was gently agitated. Not a branch did he leave out, but searched every inch

with utmost care. Not once did he raise his head to look about him. If he had, he must have seen us, for we were quite close. I was absorbed in watching him, when I felt my friend by the winter fire was growing impatient.

"Oh yes, I remember," I said, and the squirrel and the nut tree vanished.

"Well," said my friend, "I thought you would never speak."

That experience of having actually to find my way from one place to another along a forgotten path exactly as I would have done had I really been there, set me thinking a great deal about these moving pictures of memory. We may call them pictures for want of a better word, but they are not pictures at all; they are never flat. The shadow self that explores the past, moves in a shadow world, quite round with a horizon; and the remembering spirit is itself the central point.

These shadow worlds are coloured, sometimes faintly, sometimes again very brilliant. The light shines and changes there, but if you notice well you will perceive that the wind blows scarcely ever. The atmosphere is still, most sounds are faint; what is said can be heard, but seldom the voice that says it, though the tones of a lover may live there for fifty years. There are no

scents there, though real scents prove most often the unlocked door that opens unexpectedly on scenes from the past.

Some of these shadow worlds may become inexpressibly dear, happy regions where the shadow-self ranges and speaks and keenly lives, returning thither a thousand thousand times. There we can walk unwetted in the rain, untired on the longest way. There the pictured faces of the dead are as real as the remembered faces of the living.

There are many old people who pass the greater part of their existence within these soundlessly revolving worlds, some finding there a larger share of pleasure, and some a larger share of pain.

There are unhappy people within whose memory a score and more of little worlds are packed away, and every one of them inhabited by a swarm of enemies who start up ready to cast their spears at the remembering spirit as it dares to venture within their borders. The wounds dealt by those shafts are painful beyond all words. They are poisoned, wounding the heart and sapping the force of life. I have heard a strong man groaning under such wounds.

And there are others to whom these worlds are the dearest things in life, part of themselves, enchanted gardens of joy.

XXVII

The Little Harper

THE little harper that plays in the brain is a most queer fellow. I know an ordinary woman who says that when she is dull, she can sit down and take upon her knee a book of printed black lines and dots. Then as she slowly turns page after page her little harper will obediently play for her intricately woven musical progressions, sonatas of Beethoven, mazurkas of Chopin. All the room is still; no living creature is in it but a motionless woman in ordinary clothes; yet these passionate harmonies are somewhere rehearsing, now loud, now soft, in their due sequence.

This woman's harper is cleverer than most. Few of us could make ourselves happy that way. But every one of us has a little servant who plays and sings within the silence more or less sweetly according to his ability. His music is almost always cleverer than our expression of it. He will sing over a tune quite correctly, in his far-away voice: and when we come to render it again, lo,

fault upon fault! That is the way with some of us; a few can reproduce note for note instantaneously, either in song or on an instrument, every variation of melody that the singer of the brain suggests.

Some can render on an instrument as sensitive as the violin and yet can command scarcely two or three consecutive notes of their own voices.

This silent singer is wilfully constructive. He will hear a snatch of melody, catch it up incomplete, sing it over and over again till we are weary of it. He is never easy, and gives us no rest till he has found some means to learn or frame it completely. Then poof! he drops it, done with for ever, or for a time at least. An incomplete phrase annoys him, a complete one ceases to interest. If he is an exceptionally gifted singer, he composes melody in the same way; a tiny strain is blown to him on the wind; again and again it is struck out on the strings of the little harp; hearing it so sweet, the fellow notes come dropping slowly in, stringing themselves as shining beads of kindred colours are strung for necklace or wrist. You might almost say the little notes cried to others, inaudible as yet, to come and join their company.

The singing birds share our experiences in this

kind; I am sure of it, having had the good fortune, as a child, to be near friends with a robin. I remember, one memorable day, we were sitting together in our private shrubbery—the robin, a puffed-out painted ball, rocking on a twig no more than a few inches from my face: it was just dosing in a friendly way, occasionally letting up and down the leathery curtain of its round black eye. Suddenly the tiniest sound was heard, a musical whisper; the bird was singing just below its breath, practising its songs in an undertone! At that moment the happiness of the child who listened was exquisite, never to be forgotten. The silver notes came pouring out, barely audible, soft and sweet beyond words. The throat rippled and bubbled, the beak was almost closed. There were short silences when the ringed eye would shut; the bird was thinking of its music, planning the next song; then the fairy whisper would begin again, ineffably, musically sweet.

Was the bird finding joy in the presence of the silent child and consciously singing for that friend and that friend alone? Or was it simply responding to the promptings of the little singer within the brain, obediently trying over variations of song?

XXVIII

Wild Music

WHO can believe that the convulsions of the worlds in space are accomplished without sound? We know now that sound produces form. We know that the shock of worlds in collision produces light. We know that the plunging commotions of the fiery stars must yield a thunderous equivalent of sound impossible to conceive. If they will not allow us sound outside the enfolding atmospheres of the stars, then light must hold within itself the faculties of sound. Vast equivalents of sound must make space harmonious.

Certain experiments prove to us that there are sounds that, when they clash together, annihilate each other, producing silence; at least, as far as our own odd little frilled ears are concerned;—just as, for our eyes, the colours are all woven together within the rich white light. So does inaudible sound pervade space in rhythms unheard by us. In this noble silence woven out of

sound, we are nursed from the beginning; through this silence, escaping syllables of the gigantic scale of the creation are for ever breaking.

Hidden away in these melodious outbreakings one can discover not melody only, but also harmony. In the wind, for instance, in a storm-wind among mountains, queer chords are to be heard something like some effects derived from the New Scale. A winter spent in a cottage on a Welsh mountain-side once gave me lessons in wind-music. The ninth wave breaking upon the shore was always thought to be the greatest, the fate-bearing one. So the ninth wind-billow, I used to fancy, was the great one, the musical one. It was always heralded by a longer, deeper silence, breathless in the blackness of the night, when the air-currents seemed to be drawing deeper down the glens; then the wind-wave could be heard gathering in its thunders from the distant sea and approaching the valley head; the deep sound would draw nearer, and, mounting the gorge, would add to itself note after note of higher pitch till it rose up and went over the mountain-head with a shrill shriek quite three and a half octaves above the roar that still sounded below. It was like the playing of a fearful organ by some giant, ignorant of the art.

Other sounds there are that hold within themselves natural harmonies. In the plunging of the wave upon the shore—of any big wave that comes in from the open sea, there may be heard a large resonant note, a clang that seems made up of smaller notes. It is hard to describe, but go you and listen to the hollow note of the wave as it rounds upon itself and falls; perhaps you may catch a sound from within that arch that is like the clanging of large cymbals, striking many notes at once within the compass of more than one octave.

Other small harmonies are easy to discover, and will occur to those that have profitable ears. Listen, for instance, to the bellow of a miserable cow. Heard at a distance it is as splendid as a bugle note. Near at hand you are confounded and deafened by the bass; far off the treble is more clear.

Six o'clock of a summer evening the insects of the woods practise their choral symphony. Scarcely even in the most beautiful church, wrapped up in and enchanted by the most perfect music, have I been so seized upon by religious ecstasy as when a small child listening alone to this extraordinary insect psalm. To the day of my end I shall not forget the solemn stillness, the

ranks of brown trunks standing like organ pipes, the bars of red-gold light that slanted down between, and the sweet chant of the multitudes that crossed and whirled within the beams.

So much for harmony. Of melodies there are plenty. There are all sorts of water melodies. The music of brooks depends upon the angle at which the water flows, the sort of water and the sort of stones that make up its bed. Not every brook is musical; but there are Welsh brooks that may be heard to play all day a continual tinkling melody. I do not know what the "musical glasses" may be; but that is how a mountain brook will sometimes sound; like glass bars struck sweetly together.

Then there are the tribes and tribes of birds, the first teachers of the human race with their different kinds of music, never to be bettered; never to be altered; a paragon music that is bound for ever to express the same simplicity, the same sharp edge of joy.

Last of all, there are those wild emblems of nature, the children of mankind. All of us are more or less compact of music, for there is rhythm woven into every frame. If the lark, that master musician, had his bones built of music, hollow reed pipes through which spin seraphic vibrations, so

there are also human creatures on this planet whose whole bodies are one outrageous, irrepressible throbbing of rhythm and melody. It is miraculous, the seeing and hearing of them. There is evidently a surging within them so violent that at times their veins stand up like chords and the sweat pours from them in the effort to express it. Where does it come from, this over-mastering impulse? Of what fire-clangings and warrings in the turbulent sun is it not the offspring? When we see this impulse in action we can divine how it was that the secret of the scale was forced at last out of the medley of creation. Those elected passioners could let neither sound nor silence be till they had reconciled the one to the other and built from them both a ladder for our ecstasy—though it took them hundreds and hundreds of years.

XXIX

Picture-Hanger

I HAVE another body-servant for the night besides that small harper who chants his melodies to me in the black hours. This other one's name is the Picture-Hanger. The two of them, he and the harper, will work together quite amicably sometimes. *Si la si la re* sings the harp; in an instant the Picture-Hanger throws before me the picture of a far-away lake of grey water once known so well, so well! Powerful is the Picture-Hanger's work; for green rushes seem to be rustling at my feet, and from over my head the wild-duck appear, flying west.

As a rule the Picture-Hanger requires no hint from his fellow; he works tirelessly and with dispatch: chiefly he likes to catch me alone and idle. The instant I lay my head on the pillow he spreads before me a medley of pictures; more and more fantastic they grow, till the Picture-Hanger's wilder brother Dream takes possession.

It has happened that after consorting with

books, the Picture-Hanger has held up before me an open page on which I have been allowed to make out a sentence or two (sometimes ridiculous, it is true), but at odd times suddenly enlightening.

If I have been much out of doors, on the moors, perhaps, the Picture-Hanger is certain to show me bracken-covered slopes, brown heather bushes, small sweet patches of short grass. Suddenly, grown tired of mere vegetable peace, I have known him flash out before me the head of a lark, five times bigger than ever was seen, brown-spotted throat, crest raised, brilliant eye as round as the sun it seeks, fiercish beak—much as it might look to a beetle; all the wild mounting energy of the creature suddenly incarnated, and for myself alone.

The Picture-Hanger has some strange ways; he will hang up a hundred thousand pictures for you but once—then for some odd reason a scene will please him, and he will make a picture of it to last you your life long, showing it to you suddenly from time to time. There is a spot in a meadow that I have not seen since I was a child, where the dragon-flies dart to and fro, and ox-eye daisies grow in a patch of quaking grass (are you there still, little flowers of my heart?), that the Picture-Hanger has kept for me as sun-bright as any day

in June. Why that patch, I wonder, more than any other beloved spot?

Chiefly he makes his pictures out of what we have been doing during the day, accurate often and dull enough: sometimes—astonishing. Thus it may happen, that suddenly grown a seer, he will set up some grey gigantic building, or break a rainbow across the wet pavement of the night, or paint upon the darkness some human countenance that reveals of a sudden some elemental quality of terror or delight.

One such picture I will note down; it is a favourite with the Picture-Hanger. How often has he not reproduced for me the moment in a rough East End thoroughfare when I first saw that brave unfortunate!

Down the middle of the queer booth-lined street she came, shawled, bare-headed, and tall. She walked with the free step and port often seen in the finer type of gipsy woman; but this one's hair was fair. As she passed I saw that one side of her face was fearfully marked by a blow. There was no effort made to conceal the disfigurement; she held her head with majesty, looked neither to the right nor to the left, and was gone in a moment.

But the Picture-Hanger knew the significance

of that moment: again and again, and always unexpectedly, he showed me that head, so defaced and so august, till I had perforce studied and pondered it well.

Even now I feel that tricky sprite of a Picture-Hanger knows more of that moment than I do. Something there is that still escapes me: or was it only a sudden perception of an entire spirit in a battered body? That woman was not shamed at all. There are, there must be, spirits unconquerable by all the indignities of life or time.

PAGES FROM LIFE

IV.—THE THOUGHT PURSUER

XXX

Illusion

A WHILE ago I sat talking to two friends and told them how I had been trying to lay hands on those mist-sisters, illusions, and how they seemed to play at hide and seek, in and out of obscurity, always lovely and alluring, yet somehow touched with horror.

"I have thought a good deal about those 'mist-sisters,'" said A. "I have come to believe that Illusion is a projection of yourself. Out of the stuff of your desires, you project something, an idealized self that you see before you, and you yourself contrive to pass into that shape and exist in it."

"Do you know a certain kind of blue-fly," said E. "Very burnished and very bright, that sits on walls in summer when everything is palpi-

tating with heat? It is one of the most futile flies there is; does nothing, but just sits and basks and throws out blue rays; lives in a blue illusion. I don't mean this as a serious contribution to the subject, but if one multiplies images one sometimes gets at a thing undiscoverable by other means."

"Your fly makes me think of the cicala," said A. "It's much the same sort of creature in intention; but it's big, nearly as long as my hand. On a hot day perhaps five of them will sit on a branch together and sing—zz—zz—zz—zzz—until the tree seems to pulsate and at last to rock, and the air about it rocks too, and there seems nothing left but pulsating life and heat. And if you climb up to the tree to hunt them, they all jet out a fine spray that catches the light and dresses the tree in a rainbow. Most likely you will find sticking on a branch what looks like a cicala; a brown empty case, perfect down to the claws, with a hole in the top through which the cicala has crawled. I have gone about with three such illusions sticking in my hat at a time. I fancy my cicala is more impertinent than the blue-fly," went on A. "You must take him for what he is worth."

One suspects that neither blue-fly nor cicala-

made rainbow are illusions; they are moments of life and honest in their way. From the true illusion one is apt to get the suggestion of loveliness and just a suspicion of terrible fate behind. The word calls up something like the picture of a mist, and a flock of dim figures half-seen through it, with wreathing arms and beckoning hands. They have lovely smiling faces —but their backs, are they empty shell-cases? or masks behind which some hairy creature hides?

Lurking far behind in the shadow of the mist there certainly is another troop of hideous beings, creatures of nightmare, of fever, of despair. They are extraordinary. Frankly they amaze one with their authentic shapes, they the progenitors of devils, home and foreign, expressed and unexpressed; hateful because they elect to torment the suffering and the weak. Terrible as they are, they are flimsy enough, as soon as ever they are pursued and overtaken. For if you grasp them the horror falls away, leaving nothing but a little shadow, a little light.

It is the lovely-faced sisters who are the really dangerous ones. They are frequenters of the young. They can take the shape of all sorts of pretty things. They burn myriads of bright lights far into the night. They give noble and

religious names to bits of pebble and shell, and make long shining strings of them for heart's delight. They have merry heels, and are for ever dancing. One of the troop carries a goblet and offers a wine that opens the gate of fancy, and sets creation spinning—or seems to do so, which is much the same thing. Nevertheless, those who have seen the horrible back of her who carries the goblet turn shuddering away.

Another of the mist-sisters is the splendid gold-handed Midas-money-illusion. She can take a thousand shapes. She can make of herself a golden calf for you to dance round in jolly company. She can appear dressed in a rainbow with gem-like eyes, her two hands held out to you, full, running over, with granted desires.

More dangerous still is the Illusion of the Flesh. She is the loveliest of all. By the light she casts about her you would say she was a Symbol. She has a thousand guises in her wardrobe: among her pots of grease paint and her wigs, she even keeps a couple of angel's wings and a nun's dress for the allurement of the godly.

They are very merry, the mist-sisters. When you are no longer young, you will find they have a way of suddenly bursting out laughing right in your face. I know an elderly gentlemen shaped

like a turtle; so fat that as he travels in to dinner he can barely get one knee before the other: after such a fashion has the illusion of a smiling dinner-table contrived to make a public sport of that poor man!

I have heard the complaint of many a mocked soul sitting in the dust-strewn hall of the Palace of Desire, when even the last laughter of the cruel sisters has died away.

I have been in at the death of more than one illusion, and always heard the same sound—the sound of the shattering of hollow vessels.

XXXI

Ignition

THAT is a vital point where flame breaks out on straw or stubble, or on the hot purple heather of the August hills. Just so vital is the moment of the birth of a thought.

Life is there ready, spreading before us all its mighty vari-coloured floor, providing the material of thought. At the moment when human consciousness, at its most vivid, comes into contact with this material in its predestined shape, the true thought is born. It springs to life. And that is a moment indeed:—for brightness accompanies its birth; and joy; and the sense of power and freedom. A flame is kindled in the thinker's soul.

Thought does not then sit silent, elbow upon knee and forehead bent; but leaps and runs, arms wide and eyes towards the sun.

Tell me, you true thinkers, is this not so?

XXXII

Communicable Fire

THE last test of all art is the generative seed it contains. The right lively work of the right lively mind is in itself a creative thing. It, too, has the seed of life, the seed of fire within it.

The true book is the book you lay down, open, turning away from it to your own thought.

The true music is that which raises up within you a creating ecstasy, sister to itself. The true pictorial art strikes upon the eyes like fire, or like the dew—that either incites or releases.

Even the crafts can be liberators. I have seen a single stone framed in such a fantastical setting of carved and twisted gold, so minute and intricately perfect in all its little recesses, that you would say that the Master Creator himself had been at work upon it with his power of water and fire and frost. It was impossible to look at it without feeling that the hand that made that little jewel was directed by a force whose unconscious servant it for the time became.

As for the poets, there are phrases of their writing—keen or flame-like in quality—which even when they have been uttered by a million mouths, and have been passed on, through the centuries, are still unworn and, in their virtue, still communicable.

It is the vital flame that matters. The top point in life is reached when the creator awakes in man; and the creator in him can be waked by creative work. There is a secret fire that can be passed on, as a lighted torch is passed from hand to hand.

XXXIII

The Singing Flame

MANY wonderful secrets can be learned by anyone who will take the trouble to study the experiments in sound shown us by Tyndall, that sweetest, most memorable of giants. Things but half apprehensible, things on the thither side of the human faculty, are revealed to us by his pleasant games with flame.

See him at work. The beautiful flame creatures, short and tall, singing and silent, stand in a row before him. The little flames are silent; the taller ones chant and sing their different notes. The taller and more powerfully projected is the flame, the louder it sings. The louder it sings, the more instant and sensitive is its response to the sound it loves, and calls master. It will dip and curtsey and dance in answer to one sound, caring nothing at all for others. And now comes the great mystery; should this favourite sound be loud and clear enough, the flame will even begin to whirl.

Sound will make flame to spin! A powerful flame produces sound! What a magic circle! Here you stand in a moment at the very centre and core of creation—the singing, whirling flame whose wild note makes other flames to whirl and sing! What a magic circle! See the shapes of the great mist-masses of the heavens as they are picked up by the heavenly harmonies and begin to whirl and turn! All are caught in the heavenly net, and must wheel into splendour.

Here we are too at the very centre and core of human life. What wonder that the human heart is so extravagant, built as it is of this wild volvent music. The song and whirling dances of the Bacchantes and the Dervishes, the Doukhobors and the Shakers—the round, dancing, singing games of the children are all directed in sympathy with the motions of the heavenly creatures. Long ago all the country-folk used to dance and sing. The women sang at their wheels and the men at the plough and the oar; men and maids danced together in the evening hour until, in the evil days, the joy-killers got abroad, and new races of slave-drivers, new races of slaves, forced on between them an unnatural life.

A strange thing may be discovered while

watching the sensitive singing flames: . . . that each of them has his own note that he loves, his keynote. Sound other notes, and the tall flame will flicker at most, scarcely bowing his head; sound his own note, and he will sink down and rise again in mad commotion.

Ah, could but some great voice, some potent note, large and resounding and pure, be heard among men—the very master-note to set their souls a-turning! What wide fields of thought lie here; what long intricate pathways leading far away; ay, right out of sight.

XXXIV

The Thought Pursuer

I. The Lost Thought

MOST of us are aware that a vast crowd of thoughts, too difficult to realize, lurk somewhere in the mind. We apprehend their presence as though we caught sight of a mist of diaphanous shapes on the farther side of a river, now near, now far; at times on the point of floating across to us, and then vanishing quite away. Many vacant hours of the night are spent in pursuing these phantoms, these disembodied ideas.

Myself I remember pursuing one for years; at a fortunate moment one night I caught her by the skirts and looked into her eyes. But she doubled upon me and slid away; and I have never come up with her again; although I know she is still somewhere about and recoverable.

A foolish mistake once lost me a thought outright. I had caught her, and soon after sat down to pin her to a page. Here is what I wrote.

The Thought Pursuer

"Astral Shapes

"If we are to believe the pundits, the wise can at will slip out of their heavy bodies of flesh and bone, and travel the world. Their shape is complete, but without substance; the intelligence is there, the spirit, the veritable thought, all packed up within an exact physical resemblance, garments and countenance, hands and expression. . . .

"In such a guise a dim thought has haunted me—a very elusive shy thought. I have pursued it, like the shadow of the beloved, through the borderland paths where the half-apprehended, the half-known, look out of the darkness, disappearing again. . . ."

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So far I wrote, then put down the pen, being called suddenly away. Now I believed the thought written down, and securely imprisoned in a mesh of tangled characters inside a black book. Therefore the Thought Pursuer that wakes in the mind lay down to rest. And while he rested, the thought rose up in the dimness, slid away, and was gone . . . gone for good and all!

. What was it—that lost thought? Was it of the bodied recollections of the dead that hang upon the air, picture-wise, and suddenly surprise the inward eye?

Was it of the visible body that thought can weave for itself? for if the substantial can take on the insubstantial, then it is not hard to figure the other easier change.

Was it of the glassy, tenuous body of a wandering thought on the confines of the mind?

Was it of the impalpable curtains that may divide us from the visitant that stands by, waiting on our grossness that refuses sight? Does such a guest come as sound comes, carried on the trembling, moving air? Or like the sunlight that can cross through a storming wind, and never, like sound, be shaken?

Or was it that I had for one delightful moment caught sight of the shadowy figure of my friend of friends, he too out hunting those dim lands, going forward to those blue horizons in alert adventure, with questing, heavenward eyes?

Whatever it was, this I know, that on a plane of experience beyond our common day, live those unrealized thoughts, as certainly as the light lives too on planets the other side of the sun. There, free and laughing, wanders that lost thought, twice as lovely as her captured sisters: but let her not boast herself; others are out on that heavenly hunting, and will have her, as sure as she lives.

XXXV

The Thought Pursuer

II. The River Pool

I KNOW a girl with a radiant head, bright-haired, bright-cheeked, bright-eyed. And that head is as bright within as without. Forth from those halls within come shapes and colours to delight you: little horses, dogs, and men, carved out of wood: painted screens, illuminated manuscripts. One day, lured by the brilliant colouring and delightful outline of that head almost as much as by the straight, clear glance, in her ear I told of my hunting a lost thought;—how the misty thing came and went, its shadow-shape disappearing always as soon as a glimpse was got of it. I told her of the crowd of invisible ones that haunt me, too swift, too tenuous, whose existence might be divined, but whose nature could never be known.

She did not hesitate, but answered at once, "I know," said she. "Those thoughts are there,

and we are all seeking them. That country is the hunting-ground for the race. It accounts for the way the same thought occurs to different people at the same time. The thought is there, and they have both caught sight of it."

Whether it was that this girl is always connected in my mind with her carved and painted creatures—tigers, horses, dogs—I cannot tell; but as I looked away I saw a river pool, and the wild creatures coming out of the forest to drink.

PAGES FROM LIFE

V.—EIDOLA

XXXVI

An Act of Renunciation

SOME of our Church people, more than ordinarily wise in perceiving the movements of the mind, like to give a formal value, a sort of body, to thoughts and aspirations as they flit by. The thought that would otherwise pass swiftly away is caught and made self-conscious and nicely dressed; just as a good little prayer will hide itself in a carved bead. When caught and dressed the thought becomes an Act, and is set down in company with other beautiful Acts of different complexion, all ready to praise the day's work, against the evening's examination. Think of the comfort of standing them in a row, like little angels, in blue and gold and crimson.

These acts have about the same effect on the conduct of the simple Christian as I imagine the act called boxing the compass has on the simple

mariner. He is shown what he is about and his direction is assured. I am not perfectly clear about boxing the compass, but I am perfectly clear about the utility of these acts.

My friend Candida is not particularly churchy; she belongs to the sect of the devout unorthodox, one which is large and increasing. Candida occasionally fabricates little acts for herself by way of spiritual discipline. This is what she tells me about one of them, as near as I can remember.

"As soon as I am got to some perfectly quiet place—the nearest rising ground is best" (says Candida)—"I stand still to realize exactly where I am and what I am, until I grow aware of myself as an insignificant breath of life, shut within feeble and perishable doors: the two small soles of my feet alone are touching the hem of the round earth, held down by force, while the rest of me belongs to air and space. About and above are the infinite wildernesses, the wheeling worlds, and I, the merest speck on the green grass, exist to-day for a few moments only; to-morrow I shall certainly be gone.

"As soon as I have got the giddy sense of the swimming air, the caverns of the sky, the turning earth that is my foothold and with which I turn, I set myself to my little Act of Renunciation;

An Act of Renunciation

I begin by stripping myself of all my possessions, the least prized first. I may indeed call myself their owner, but I can by no means make them my own;—such and such four walls, this old chest, that picture, my favourite pen, my best dress of all; it is most ridiculous; a squirrel might as well make a fuss about dropping a few nuts; and so I lay them all down in a heap.

"Next come my hopes, a cheery company, my dear companions in the night. These too, with an effort, I can throw from me. After all, their seed was sown in the past: the root from which they spring is secure in the ground; if sound enough, they will flourish now without my aid.

"Then come my occupations, the things I love to make and do. As I lay them down, in my vanity I admire them, and grieve to put them by. Then I look far away and they shrink to nothing. What are they that I should praise them? Does the bee praise its cell or the sea-worm its horn of clay?

"I look down at my treasures where I have laid them in heaps and they are nothing. I have renounced them. My own spirit I cannot renounce; if it is destined to endure, it will do better yet—it will weave for itself a finer garment, attract to itself a more worthy house

of treasures; for it lies in the heavenly will that all creatures shall ever be striving from good to better, from below, upward: it is the law, and wherever I go that law will be there before me.

"And now I am almost ready to depart, almost ready for the narrow house; but I have other treasures, and, woe is me, I cannot cheerfully lay them down. I think of them and count them over; those clear eyes with their true beams of light; those voices whose cadencing pleases me, whose speech can at times transcend; those hands whose touches are so serviceable and kind; those smiles that enlighten every day, they will not be put down.

"I look up to the heavenly spaces; rest is there, law, and the freedom that lies within law; a radiant, ineffable sweetness: but the human heart, so warm, so kindly, and so wise, it is here on earth that it has its home; its place is by the hearth, the dear nurse of us all. Alas, that it should be laid away and we go hence without it."

This is what Candida said to me, as nearly as I can remember. She has told me that she never goes home to tea with such rapture as when she comes down from her hill-top. She also assures me that the effect of this little act, if honestly performed, will last for a whole week.

XXXVII

Eidola

I HAD a friend once, since lost. She had hair between auburn and gold in colour. It had many shades; if she brushed it smoothly and knotted it close, it was golden; if she left it more loose, so that the shadows crept in and mixed with it, it was auburn. She had a well-shaped pale face, and a voice that was both tender and resonant. She always wore blue clothes of a good dye and of trustworthy material which she made for herself. About her head, gold or auburn, a narrow blue band was always tied.

My friend had never married: she had had many sorrows, but she had outridden them all. She seemed always ready to serve. If two or three sat in a room and anything dropped, it was she who picked it up. She fetched and carried; she sewed for her women friends; if anyone was ill, she liked to help to nurse them. She had a great many books, very interesting ones, which she lent freely, always liking to have them punctually

returned. Midway in her life, she told me, she learned the great secret; a secret so difficult and obscure that there are few that penetrate it. Quite suddenly, while lying awake one night, she perceived that to love is everything; to be loved may be nothing; for the heart that loves has the infinite riches, while the heart that is loved may be as cold as a stone. And, straight from the next morning, my friend modelled her life on this new conception.

My recollection of her is very vivid; if anyone mentions her name (most happily was she called Mary) I see an instant clear picture of the blue dress, the ruddy hair, the pale face, and I can even recall (a much more difficult thing to do) the tones of her touching voice; with all this I have a sense as though a breath of helpfulness and affection had suddenly entered my mind along with her image.

Since she died, I have spoken with several people who knew her more or less well, and they all appear to retain something of the same impression. It is as though her peculiar and unchanging habits of dress and temper had liberated a large number of fixed images of her in other people's consciousness.

Though now it is, alas! a good while since she

died, the picture of her that survives within my memory is more lively and persistent than the recollection of many a one who might but just have left the room.

It is probably because of this particular persistence of her image (due in part to her peculiarities of countenance and voice and the colour of her hair and clothes, and in part to her habit of mind) that I came at one time to think a great deal about those picture images of ourselves that we are continually giving away.

I imagine the flock of gold-haired Maries still living in the memory of her friends and acquaintances, some vivid and speaking, others paler; some faint and perishing; others again less sympathetic, but all, I fancy, fairly alike, dressed in blue, and attempting saintliness.

Here comes in the question, should we care about these liberated likenesses of ourselves that hover in the background of people's minds? If they could be fixed and presented to us in form and colour and life, a dreadful host, how intimidated we should be. By far the greater number would be no true likeness, for minds which are wholly foreign can receive no just impression of each other. Chalk has never yet beheld cheese aright. Nor can the less comprehend the greater.

"Go up, thou baldhead," children and fools have said to the prophet since time began.

But even granting the inevitable unlikeness, what an argument we have here in favour of comeliness of dress and demeanour and speech.

My image in your mind, what kin is it to me?

Are they not in a way like children of ours, this flock of coloured articulate shadows, who derive their being from us, who wander in the thought and among the dreams of our friends? Out into the world they go, some like and some unlike us, to fare well or ill, to fade away and die or become abhorrent; or to persist and grow more instant and more beloved.

The sinister images of a sinful man, what evil springs about those ghostly footsteps. An evil shadow will start most vivid out of a past that has been long dead. I have seen every face in a peaceful room alter at the coming in of such a presence. Every spirit darkened and each tongue spoke bitterly. I am certain the very air of the room grew less pure.

On the other hand, there are those who, greatly loving and greatly loved, send forth their shadow selves, a host of snow-white messengers. I have known many a man, and many a woman too, whose *eidola* were like a busy crowd of angels, entering

many houses, teaching and comforting many hearts.

It is these natural miracles I like to dwell upon, because their right apprehension can illuminate life. That smile you gave your friend at that street corner; that kind word you said in passing; why, that is nothing: nay, but perhaps you have liberated an angel who, fairer of face than you, is comforting a secret trouble that you know nothing of.

Follow small beginnings to their great end and you find effects so startling as to be almost incredible. I will not dwell on the dark side of these miracles; I cannot bear to think of the black seed of the evil word, the evil deed, its vitality, its persistence, its multiplication through centuries; so that one man may loose upon the earth a thousand fiends (ay, in sober truth, and more than a thousand), to the wounding of babes yet unborn. I would rather think of the miraculous multiplication of the good man's self; or of the good woman's self, which is fortunately much the same thing. The little dressmaker of Yarmouth, who while she stitched for her living, visited daily Yarmouth's hideous jail;—how the shadows of that insignificant figure have floated through Yarmouth town, imponderable, but preaching,

teaching, beckoning to the laggard spirits of men! Think of a man like John Ruskin, instructor of many to-morrows;—once the tiny care of his mother. How could that mother have dreamed that ten thousand ghostly sons of hers would go out to the world, to unseal the eyes and minds of men?

Think of it; the man himself may sleep on his pillow, unconscious; yet his shadow selves may be abroad, speaking, pleading, upholding; ay, so great may be their multitude that in the end they may lift up the round world.

XXXVIII

A Dialogue between the Lover and the Beloved

"I LOVE you," says the Lover.

"That is very little between you and me," says the Beloved.

"Dear traitor!" says the Lover. "Very little? Why, it is all the world and all heaven too."

"For *now* it is," says the Beloved. "But I change and you change. How can we know that the changed I and the changed you will agree? Perhaps you will want to be looking north while I am looking south."

"You and I may change—true," says the Lover; "but you and I adore the changeless One."

"That is a great matter between you and me," says the Beloved.

"There—in his dominions," says the Lover, "is the still land where we can always meet. One crowned moment in its heavenly airs and we must always return thither."

"I see now that we can never be lost to each other again," says the Beloved.

XXXIX

The Hearth-Keeper

TWO loves, that of the Lover and the Beloved, meet and join. At this meeting-point the fires of life start forth. The hearth-fire is lit. About it gather many delightful things of life—the newly kindled spirits of children; food and good companionship; laughter and other kinds of music. There is shelter from the cold—shelter for spirits that else might have been shivering alone on the broad hard ways of the world.

But this central fire will not continue to burn unless it is served. Service is the clear condition of its life. Heavenly love may burn with the cool, eternal fire of the gem, but these earthly loves are not made so.

To-day I saw the cold young bride sit careless in the house; like a snowdrop, with her pale, soft hair, her beautifully carved features, her delicate brows hanging silent over a book: her feet that once used to hurry to meet the quick step of her

lover, now motionless; her lips fast in their perfect bow, her hands useless.

Even thus does the hand refuse its service, and the fire die—oh, shameful hand! Expiring flame!

XI

The Daughters of the Green Bay Tree

THE flourishing of the Green Bay Tree has been an offence to the righteous ever since the world began. Although we are on the whole less righteous than we used to be, and although there are so many bay trees of differing complexion in our landscape of to-day, we are still a little perturbed by the sight.

The impertinence of unsanctified prosperity becomes more puzzling still when the Green Bay Tree, grown powerful, is seen to shelter with its branches singing birds and gardens of flowers. Gentle ladies and fair children are the inhabitants of these gardens. I have known them, many and many a one, living happy in this upas shelter. I have known them graceful, cultured, thinking no evil, full of charity, innocently lovely in silk and gold-set jewels.

Yet I knew that if one had the gift of seeing things as they really were, these ladies would have seemed to be clothed in garments that were

dyed in blood. I knew how the money which endowed them with this soft and virtuous leisure had been ground from the faces of the poor. Like a hunting tiger the husband and father daily destroyed life that he might nourish his own.

Revolution after the old pattern would certainly send these ladies to the guillotine; but, on the other hand, St. Peter would as certainly have out his keys and open the gates to them. Then I fancy one of the lesser archangels, Sariel, perhaps, would take them aside and explain why the last lesson on earth had been so sharp. In a glass he would show them the companies of delicate women, smiling, with closed eyes, and open hands stretched out to the men who filled them with diamond drops that were the tears of the poor. Then Sariel would no doubt lead them apart to the quiet valley kept for the good and gentle women with the closed eyes and the open hands that had been the temptation of men.

Every morning a special sermon would be preached them by Sariel; and the good and gentle ladies would be sure to pay him particular attention because of his white and shining countenance, his long white locks and rainbow wings. "Daughters," he would say, while they listened

with purified hearts and folded hands, "on the day that Eve, your mother, first tasted the fruit of the tree that grew eastwards in Eden, she gave to you two gifts, the knowledge of good and the knowledge of evil. It is not enough to know good: you must know evil also. Even the divine Beatrice was aware of hell. You have said that those who look upon evil become spotted themselves: nay, but you should have looked upon evil to clean it away.

"Listen now to your condemnation: In your eyes you have sinned because you closed them upon sorrow. In your ears you have sinned because you shut the doors of them against crying. In your feet you have sinned because you went not down to the poor. In your hands you have sinned because they received and gave not. Daughters, in your bodies entirely have you sinned; lo, what was in this cup which nourished you so delicately and of which you drank with averted eyes? Answer now and say!"

But the poor ladies would by no means be able to answer, but would fall to weeping and beating their hands together. And Sariel, perceiving their repentance, would yearn over them in his heart, so that his aspect would become more

effulgent, his raised wings shed a streaming rainbow-coloured light, while his white shining countenance would be seen to dispense pity and judgment. . . .

"Daughters, on the spilt blood of your sisters has your gentleness been fed."

Then the poor ladies would be bowed down with grief and weep sorely, pressing their long locks of hair to their streaming eyes. Almost Sariel would refrain the punishment and gently he would say:

"Is this Purity with a dove's countenance and jewelled clothes and stained hands that traffic with evil behind the back?

"Behold the dun-clad women, matrons and damsels, who, themselves as white as snow, have looked upon evil to clean it away. My daughters, look now and see, for Gabriel is taking them to the upper gates!"

PAGES FROM LIFE

VI.—HEAVEN FIELD

XLI

The Church Roof

NORFOLK people know Thrypton Church well. It stands boldly up on a hill in a flat country. From without, this church looks unsmiling and grey like a hard-tempered person in middle life. Within, on the hottest day it is cold and sad; the walls are cracked and stained with mildew; the pavements are here and there broken; not only natural decay but the chill of human indifference here speak coldly to the heart.

But if you lift your eyes to the roof, oh, how beautiful! Among its rafters a hundred painted angels are on the wing.

For how long, I wonder, has that flock of winged heads flown in that dark roof tree?

The oaken beams are almost black in colour and the angels startlingly bright: quite strong is

the impression that the church is dead but that the angels are still alive among the rafters.

The sentiment or genius of the man who invented that roof was so much livelier than that of him who shaped the stone that one part of the church has survived the other.

It is not the mere shaped material that we see in such a building as this, but the embodiment of the mind or minds that shaped it.

Stone can make thought visible: you can read the aspiration of hundreds of years ago in a stone column, should the true spirit of a man have been imprisoned within.

I have seen broken and fallen ruins that have filled me with an awe that no living ædificated grandeur has ever inspired. I remember a ruined abbey in a lonely valley of North Wales, where the skeleton of an immense rose window still stands up, unsupported, and is seen against a flowing sky. Lifelong was the impression to be gained from it; it was not the mere stone that was falling into ruin: it was the vesture of a man's idea, perhaps even of his soul, that was then finally passing away.

If ever the cold stone of Thrypton Church is brought to life again, it will be for the sake of the angelic flock in the roof and the gracious and living imagination that set them flying there.

XLII

The Flowery Field

HOW delightful to be God and have all the best side of people turned to one. It is He that sees all the beauty there is in the wretches of the earth.

Once I dreamed that I saw all the people of the earth as God sees them. In my dream I was walking by the hedge-side of one of those enamelled pastures that are so unbelievably radiant and fragrant in June. The dream field was the gayest of the gay, more varied in colour than any English field, more like a snatch of a Palestine spring—yet English too. The sun shone much more brightly than is common in dreams, giving a sense of vibrating brilliance. I was beginning to sort out the flowers by their different colours of yellow and white, blue and purple and rose colour, when suddenly a flash passed over the field, a sort of shiver; and I saw that what I had taken for flowers, holding their cups up to the light, were in reality little human

figures kneeling and looking upwards in prayer. In that moment I saw a tiny group of red creatures in Turkish caps, of little nuns in blue; groups of creatures dressed in yellow; when suddenly all ran together and became confused, and I awoke. I remember a sense of distress at the dissolving of the vision, the effort—the rush of the mind's attention after the vanishing colour and light, in the moment of waking.

Spring never comes back. I never walk in a flowery field but I recall the dream, I see again the little aspiring figures in their many-shaped bonnets and caps.

Such a dream might be, I take it, the result of a sudden effort of the imagination to take a clear hold of waking ideas which had been only half-captured, half-mastered. So at any rate I took it to be, and was grateful for the send it gave me in the direction I wanted to go. For one moment I had seen people at their prayers very much as the Visiting Spirit finds them out on one of his blessed expeditions round the earth—all kneeling, all stretching upward to the light. To him the Mussulman's turban is no doubt as little disconcerting as the coal-black shining cylinder or the bows and feathers of a European Sunday hat.

XLIII

The Garden

ONLY this morning the wish came over me to be a preacher, to stand up in a pulpit and talk to my people about the Garden of the Soul. It is what one might call a pretty and workable moral image; one could dilate by the hour upon it, abandoning reason, beautifying the pretty notion.

For instance, one might enlarge upon the soil; scarcely one garden is like another: in some the soil is too light and thin; in others too sticky and clayey: so there are natures that are poor and cold; others that are heavy and dull. Think of the unwholesome soils—of the lot of distorted natures, born so, struggling a lifetime through, tormented by an inherent malice.

Then there are the flowers, the lovely virtues, all orderly in rows, shedding a sweet savour. There are the weeds with their scrambling growth, so much more lively and offensive and determined than the flowers. (And that is a

significant thing when you come to think of it. Our choicest beauties are grown under protection and cultivation.)

There is the wonder of the Will; that gardener upon whose good purpose and upon whose labours the well-being of the garden depends. Good gardener, take no holiday! Do not lie down to rest among your roses or you will wake to find the caterpillar, the weed, and the fly.

There are the stormy winds that overthrow and break the flower-stalks, yet do they purify all the dull corners of the garden. There is the rain; alas, for our tears! but alas, too, for the dry heart that has never known a sorrow! There is the awful mystery of the recurring visits of the sunlight, of the flowers that stretch towards it in the night and open their cups in the morning. Without it, they are not; because of it, they are. How did the bud know, as it awoke in the darkness, that in the morning it would be blessed? How did the unmade flower perceive the call of the sun?

In this wonder-garden of the soul there are grey days and cold days; days of storm, days of stillness and perfume, of bright star-blossoms that open to the sun, the inner divine light.

Last of all there is the spectacle of the dying

flower in the sunshine. The sun is there and the young flowers are rejoicing in it; but the dying flower would as soon be in the dark; the sunlight is efficacious for it no more: is it so, indeed? or, with its last breath, is it still blessing the sun?

Think of the tormented, the broken, the dying! Without, sunrise and sunset enchant the sky; within are the pillows and the blankets and the medicine bottles; the nurse's hand and the long slow pain. Does the dying flower sometimes cry as its stalk bends over, "Oh, how I suffer! Ah, cruel sunlight, that brings me no aid"?

If I were the preacher I would here climb down from my pulpit, and, coming among my people, I would say, "Dear brothers and sisters, is there anyone among you that can endure poverty, ruin, bereavement, woundings, disease, the cruelties of men, and finally the pains of death, and still behold with firm adoration the Glory of the Lord? Come, then, let such a one be my teacher, for I teach him no more."

XLIV

The Pinnacle

THANK God I live on a ball! There are no ends of the earth. There is no Ultima Thule. Anyone may prove it. That very spot where one takes up one's stand always proves to be the centre-point of a revolving universe, and a centre-point in time. Behind flow back the years in an endless chain. Moment by moment flow forward out of the mist the uncountable ages. Wherever the creature makes a dwelling, everything is at the pains to revolve about its door. The ground where the feet are planted, there is the keystone of the earth's arch, the spot which is nearest heaven. No creature can be nearer the stars than another. Nothing restrains our flight heavenward but the chaining of our foot-soles to the ground.

It is easy to forget that this is always and everywhere so. There is a sort of forlornness that comes just before starting for far-distant, solitary places. One thinks of the remote destination

as a dim land, in which everything is colourless and remote and leaning this way to the familiar centre. In the fancy, the roofs of exile are somehow out of drawing. Beyond the bar of the horizon line how should the same amplitudes be found?

Yet as soon as the journey has begun how the miracle of those gliding revolving circles attends every foot of the way. As the traveller passes on he finds himself continually an honoured guest at the centre of the heavenly tent. The moment that he is fixed in his new dwelling, behold him seated on the very pinnacle of the world. The half-hoop of the sky as it arches over his head, the round of the earth-line where it meets the sky, the circlewise journey of sun and moon—all this turns and turns about his life. Above, before him, and behind, on the right hand and on the left, swim the multitude of the stars: he is the nearest to them of anyone on earth; he must be since he occupies the very tip-top point of the whole circle of this circular world.

XLV

The Fish

ST. ANTHONY once preached to the fishes, and they all stood on their tails to listen, in rows, at the water's edge.

But I have been lucky enough to have a sermon preached to me by a fish.

It happened one day that with a diurnal mind, packed full of all manner of small detail, I came to stand for a moment by a bowl in which two goldfish were swimming The larger of the fish, a pale red-and-gold one, was diving about below the water-weed; the other, a ruddy creature of really outrageous brilliance, balanced itself on motionless fins near the top of the water. At the same time it stared upward with two round black eyes at a crimson hyacinth head that bent in a half-hoop over the bowl, drawn down by its own weight.

I went away, filled up a busy hour, and returned again; the ecstatic fish was still suspended, bathing itself in the light that streamed from the flower.

What a reproach was this ecstasy to my careful state. The flame-like creature was wrapt like an Indian worshipper in contemplation all devoid of thought. What a life was there! The sun-rays shot slanting upon the face of the polished water; they descended and were caught in a net of feathered gold. No cares down there, no weariness, all its days a dream, nothing but motion, the water, the light, the gorgeous companion by whose side it slept; and now the red radiance and the airy perfume of the flower that bent towards it from another element.

That round bright eye, birdlike but fixed, became brother to my own: it beckoned the way to another world, the life of rivers and the sea.

There is something fearful in sea-depths; the cold and heavy water, the—to us—expressionless faces that pass by, the terror of the great that swallow up the small: yet since the eye of the rapt fish preached to me of God-below-the-wave, I have felt a new confidence of watery imaginations; I am become as water-bewitched as St. Anthony himself.

Picture the life: there you hang, balanced in mid-stream, gazing up or down, or on both sides at once; picture the long gold shafts of dawn that sink to the lower seas; the knitted webs

of light, feathery gold spun in opal, that tremble above and are cast down below by the upper wavelets that chatter in the air.

What noise is there in the water? Certainly there is the clang and reverberation of the wave upon the shore carried back and far out to sea. There is the noise of all the merry action of the surface waves in conflict with the air. There is the murmur of water within water, of the current that runs sheathed in the still water's side, as the wind-rush beats on the stiller airs. There must be a soft sound of the fanning water-weed, and a noise of the gushing of the under waters about the sunk rock. There are the voices of the fish as they call to each other and the noise of their bird-like passage, the whir of their fins.

Anyone can see that the fish have great pleasure in their motion, in their balancing, in their rising and falling in the sudden skim through the water, or their steady sailing on an even line. Then there is the pleasure of catching their dinner all day and every day; of excursions to the summit of their own roof-tree to meet the diamond-topped wavelets warm with the sun; or better still, to feast on the strangely tasting raindrops that pelt upon the sea. Indeed, those

marvellous leaps towards heaven taken by the fish tell us sufficiently of their joy in these pleasures they have and many more, sensations of which we know nothing. I wish we may not be often further from the centre of wisdom than the decent fish.

Perhaps in our best moments we are not so unlike them after all. The flowing tides and the clear waters that swing above, around, below—some of us have felt them and know their buoyancy. Our great days are those when we float and swim, upborne by the invisible atmospheres that gush about the soul.

XLVI

A Prayer-Book

SOME three years have gone since I became the possessor of an old Irish prayer-book. It is quite a plain book—gilt leaves, black leather cover, stamped in a thin design of infinitesimal black roses in garlands; evidently French. It looks like any other prayer-book, save that the beautiful Irish character within makes it something uncommon. This plain black prayer-book, however, changed in one moment my feeling towards all other prayer-books in whatever language they may be written, round about whatever creed.

For some time the book lay on my desk and I forgot it. Then one day I saw it again and took it up. The leaves fell apart, and the page was before me—black and white; the beautiful regularly formed characters, marching across and across; delightful a's and handsome t's, handsomer than the Greek. The page had fallen open at a prayer for the enlightenment of darkness.

In a moment the book seemed alive; it lay between my hands, a miracle. I saw it at last for what it was, the supremest essay of man.

The world of the Spirit is huge and vast; it is unseen and unseeable; once on a time it was trackless. What then might this be that I held in my hand? Were these prayers the paths cut out by men in wild untrodden places, whose terrors are great? These paths are traced in the darkness, and but half secure. Along them come crowding the quiet souls who else had been lost in the night. For these souls the lamps are lit, and the paths are guarded. At every corner the guides cry out the way. Far off in the darkness Paradise is set, and this plain black book one may hold in the hands is the key by which they enter.

XLVII

Cock-Crow

THERE is an old Hebrew law that seems to have arisen out of a wonderfully delicate perception, an almost ethereal sense of virtue. This law commands that morning prayer shall be said as soon as the first light permits white to be distinguished from blue.

It is a very strange thing that in the twilight blue loses its colour and fades into white. I first discovered this as a child of eight years old. I remember jumping from the carriage, a prisoner released, at the end of the long day's travelling that took me every spring out of a paved street of houses and a terror of lessons, straight into Paradise. I was wearing a bright blue dress. I remember running across the gravel sweep in the dusk, almost delirious with joy at the scent of the beloved meadows, the gardens, and the flowering shrubberies. As I ran I glanced down at my dress, and, behold! its bright blue had faded into a pale grey white.

When, many years later, I read about this old Hebrew ordinance, I remembered the blue dress and that heavenly twilight of my childhood; so I took the trouble to have ready a piece of blue drapery and a piece of white against the next morning's dawn. When I first got up the light was just beginning to struggle through the darkness. There lay the draperies, two heaps of dusky pallor; it was quite impossible to tell white from blue. Sitting down by the open window to watch and wait for the light, I began to comprehend the significance of the old law. The cocks began to crow with that loud, shrill shout that has something exciting in it. Above, the heavens were clear and faintly spread with disappearing stars. Below, the earth lay black and still apparently asleep. But soon there was a light stir abroad in the air. All living green things were awaking from sleep; they began to move and rise up and stretch out their green, living fingers to meet the day.

As the light increased, and the flush deepened in the east and in the west, there seemed to be running through the earth and sky a sense of joy, pure and fine. It was a moment unlike any other moment of the day or night, when at last the two heaps of drapery separated themselves one from

the other, the one deepening into blue, the other brightening into white.

This was the moment of the Hebrew prayer.

Within doors, blue deepened and white shone. Out of doors, the dawn wind rose and floated lightly by to meet the sun. The air was inexpressibly sweet, washed by the passage of the dews, freshened by the darkness and the silence of the night. It seemed as though nature herself desired spaces untroubled by any sound, and therefore night had silenced the wings and feet of the creatures that belonged to her.

At the dawning, this air so sweet, so untroubled, is like a draught of life to the waking world. The birds feel it. Of all the recurrent miracles that delight, or should delight, our daily life, the dawn-song of the birds during a quarter of the year is one of the most surprising. As soon as the light is half come, they wake and begin. Refreshed by their night's sleep, and still fasting, they turn their heads up to the sky and sing all together the loudest, most joyful song of the day. The noise is fairly deafening. It is a resonant, metallic sound, this of a thousand small voices chanting each one a different song. There is nothing like it in our music, nothing like it in the world. As I leaned from my window, there they were on

every tree, singing spirits like tiny painted angels, their vibrating throats, choir on choir of stringed harps, sending out enchanting discords.

Many things combine to make this the most wonderful hour of the day, clarity of the air, the cold freshness of the dew, the silence of men, the pouring in of the light.

Nothing delighted me more in my childhood than the story of the mermaid's palace in the sea, with the gushing of the water in and out of the palace doors, the strange green light, and the fishes that swam in at the open window. The same strangeness and pleasure now beset me when I think of the moving tides of air about our doors, the black repose of night, the silver spears of light on their morning race towards our low heavens, the argent palaces raised above us by the sun.

These are the miracles of every day. I can promise anyone who will get up in the morning to watch the parting of white from blue, that they will gain from the enterprise some glimpse at least of the indestructible mystery that still lives in common things.

XLVIII

A Rosary of a Day

WHO can tell us of what shape and size, what and how great, is that fragment of time that we call the present?

As far as human creatures are concerned, I fancy that the duration of the present moment might fairly be measured by the heart-beat—that pulsation whose various echoes enter so persistently into our life and its expressions; into our music, which they dominate; into the war-terror of beating drum and marching feet: which are heard in the ticking of our innumerable clocks that parcel out day and night; and which so strangely often reappear in the sounds of human labour.

The telling of a rosary might represent, in the rise and stay and fall of the beads, the passing of this one moment of present time. Such a rosary of the day might help us to recollect that life is really a series of infinitesimal points of time, each one of them in its turn a real, present, vital thing. Each fresh instant of our lives is like a new birth

of time. The destined moment lies hid in the future's lap. Day by day, and hour by hour, the long chain runs; nearer and nearer comes the destined moment; it leaps into life, is quick and vivid and real for a second's flash; its value is lost or won; then lo! it falls behind us, in its uses done with for ever.

Seen after this fashion the smallest moment of the present acquires new value. Foretold by the ages and destined to fairness, it will never return.

Was there not once a set of wise men who made themselves famous by discussing how many angels could stand on the point of a needle? I vow this shall be my ideal; on the needle point of the present there shall stand as many angels as can find a footing. Now, and now, and now, I shall say to myself as the irrevocable moments flit by; this, and this is the moment of life: this one, as it passes, is wide as eternity, and its harbourage spacious as all time.

What a shining chain a life so lived might be! Can I make my meaning clear and show to others what I see—a string of flashing jewels, each one broad as the sky? Nay, and is not this the universe and God's own scheme?

PAGES FROM LIFE

VII.—QUESTIONS

XLIX

The Disk

I WOKE up the other morning to find the room full of bright summer sunshine. A whip-like curving rainbow shone on the ceiling with a patch of white light for its centre, evidently cast by a mirror with bevelled edge.

Suddenly I went to sleep again, and distinctly heard a voice saying in my ear, "Take heed and well walk," and a hand (I saw no more than the hand) hung before me a round disk of metal carved in segments of a circle, and bands with Sunrise, Morning, Afternoon, Evening, and other words carved upon them—the letters not cut but standing out—and in the middle a little figure sitting with humped-up knees and draperies, her head down on her knees. Instantly I awoke again, and saw that the rainbow and the light patch had not moved the least bit from their places.

Ever since then I have been trying to discover whether my dreaming mind invented the motto or simply reproduced something I had heard or read. But I cannot find it anywhere.

And that little figure with its humped-up knees in the centre—who is she? And by what suggested? Is it she that cries so far away, that moans like the wind within, when sorrow or fear are on the way?

L

The Growing Point

WHEN shovelling the heavy earth upon root stocks of tender plants in autumn, one must think with pity of the weight the young shoots will have to heave up presently. In spring the little spear-points come pushing up with clods of earth upon their heads, out of measure large and heavy; much as if you saw a babe sitting up with a tub on its head.

These shoots of tender green, explorers and light-finders, are equipped for the road to the upper air with a green sword-point; and the green sword is capped by a hood or sheath which is continually renewed as it wears out, and this is the growing point.

While watching the daffodils and their kindred at their work of clod-breaking in the spring, one is not always sure which is oneself and which is the clod-breaker. Its struggles are much the same as our own and both are involuntary. Within

us there is the same impulse, independent of will, pushing always with great force towards the light. In my own earliest conscious thought, I was aware of some principle within me that continually struggled on towards the upper air, that cried out with passion, "Whither?" "Whence?" "Where, oh, where?"—something that must and would make its way through and across custom, tradition, belief; that heaved up almost unbearable weights in its passage towards the light.

As life is lived out, one comes to have a great value for that impulse, painful though it may be in action.

Strong in childhood and in early youth, it is often smothered and suppressed in later years; too often it ceases to grow and renew itself, and the life of the spirit dies away within. Custom, tradition, authority, expediency most of all, are heavy weights; they will crush a weak soul; and a strong one, in bursting out from beneath them, will come by some ugly wounds.

It matters little about scars, however, so that the life is unhurt. For what is this growing point of the mind? It is the living finger that the soul holds up to God. By that outstretching it climbs and reaches at last to its flower and

its fruit. Clap an extinguisher on that growing point, and you may get sideways growths indeed, but never the predestinate stature and grace. It is astonishing how the pressure of an ever so little insincerely held belief does thwart the mind. No yoke the body can bear is as grievous as the yoke of a lying belief upon the soul. An intentionally swallowed lie is like a stone upon a grave. When I say "lie" I do not mean that which is intrinsically untrue, but that which a particular intelligence uneasily suspects to be untrue for itself. That exact spot where the uneasiness resides is the mind's growing point. The uneasiness is a sign of health—of growth that objects to being stifled. You will be wise then if you follow the faintest secret intimation from within rather than the loudest clamouring from without. A deep-implanted instinct warns the soul of far-distant sources of light, of the true direction of the dawn. Even if you have to give up every dear belief, the golden streets, the loving Saviour, even (oh, midnight of anguish!) the everlasting arms of the Father;—still if you follow the secret voice, time, the pendulum of God, shall bring you right. You have but to wait in honest patience and creep on your painful way; then as you go, you will find that all

creation is with you: the earth in its turning, the wind of the dawn, the rain and the sunshine, they are yours; truth itself has bound wings to your feet, and your puny strength is multiplied by all the battalions of God.

LI

Three Atmospheres

A TERRIBLE thing is new doctrine. There is such peace and comfort in the old: to taste the old is like sitting in the corner by the fire: to taste the new is like launching your boat on unknown seas and sailing out of time with your face to the winds.

Out in those spaces you may chance to meet Truth a-walking on the waves in her wildest mood; in her right hand she holds the bitter bread of new doctrine, which, if you will only taste it, does so brace and reform the soul.

On a day lately, having pushed out my boat to the loneliest bounds of these loneliest seas, Truth came walking by me with a cold smile on that splendid face that I do always adore. She offered me her bitter bread, saying, "Look below." I looked down into the heavy, clanging deeps and saw the croaking fish sail by and the great devour the small. She laughed and asked me how I liked the Creator's plan of setting His creatures

to feed upon one another from the top downward or the bottom upward, however I chose to take it. "What do you think," says she, "of the chanting of the thrush that has his belly full of worms, of the roaring of the lion that has torn the deer, of the shouting of the preacher full-fed on flesh? What do you think of it for a notion, the starting of a world that way?"

Seeing me utterly confounded and plunged in despair at the boat, Truth, who has only to do with strong souls, passed on and left me—left me to heavy days and nights of thought. It was a long time before I got over this terrible meal that Truth had made me eat. For a year or two I could not think at all, but sat and sewed in the chimney-corner. Then the explorer's passion revived in me, and presently I pushed out again, only to be met by Truth in the same spot.

"Good day," says she; "and how are you now?"

"Well enough," I answered. "I have thought it all out. Ill-conditioned brood as we human creatures are, I have met in my time with mountains of goodness and beauty. However it be got, part of the thing that the Creator has gotten is fine. Have you no sympathy for Him in His hard task? He has to make the beast

from the clay, the angel from the beast. It is all I beg for, leave to help Him in His hard task, if ever such a little."

"That sounds very nice," said Truth; "and are you sure He wants your help?" And again she smiled at me with her fearful enigmatic smile that sinks me to the earth with dread.

"Look down again into the deep seas," she said. "There is no making of angels going on there. Look down."

I looked below again into the thick salt seas, whose currents run shoreless as our winds. I saw the heavy waters tremble with movement and pale light; and I saw again the living creatures, how easily they glided, what pleasures they had. Were they not come straight from the bosom of God and as near to His purpose as we?

Truth passed away and left me. I looked below again, and a fish rose in the boat's shadow and stared upon me with a solemn, religious eye —the very eye of Undine that asked for a soul. Yet why should not the fish too be His beloved? The darlings of creation are not known.

In their fancy men and women have peopled the waters with creatures something after their kind; but always they have denied them a soul.

You cannot have one under water, it seems; so Undine still wanders soulless, under the wave.

The rest of us have crawled out of the water and strongly established ourselves upon the earth in a less heavy atmosphere.

With much pain, such of us as go upon two feet do contrive to "make" for ourselves a queer little soul.

Our aspiration carries us further still:—fluttering out from and above the thick, elastic web of our atmosphere, we have imagined yet another population, pure, emancipated, illuminated. No longer forced to swallow either the wave or the wind, released from the heavy clogs that bind earth-creatures down, what might not be the lovely ways and manners of the angels?

LII

In Response

EVERYWHERE about us we are watching the struggle of nature into consciousness; and always in response to some invitation from without. Dawn and the sun in the sky; the flowing air; rain and rivers and the sea; these were not marvels enough: there must be creatures to feel and see them; so the trees and the plants grow up holding out green fingers to them, to the wind and the sun and the rain. Still the glory from without invited; and free creatures began to run and leap and go, in a mighty increase of pleasure, a mighty increase of pain.

There is no struggle of nature from within unless in response to some call from without. The eye shines upon the morning. The ear opens upon sound. Sun and sound were there at the beginning, and eye and ear came forth to greet them.

There is another invitation, another response: —as the flower stretches its cup to the sun-rays

and is filled, so does the soul lean out towards the invisible, and finds its refreshment. The hosts of creatures leap into life in answer to the call of the Sun; the splendours of the Word of God call forth a million souls.

Those steeples and spires and domes and minarets are actual wonders—the visible answering to the invisible all round the world. In what beauty do they ascend and infloresce—the fairest thing to which man has set his hand. And on whatever other stars life is breeding, be sure that those watch-towers of the soul have arisen or will arise.

There is enough in this to hearten us. The backward pull of the human brute is very strong; but the sweet, awful thundering of the law is stronger still. The dance and movement of order, brightness, joy, the mysterious salutary consecrations, are slowly taking us on. There are a myriad years of an untried future before the children of men, time for them to extract the unmeasured delights of life, a gift to all that live. Never fear but these creatures of another day will be urged forward. The Lord of the hosts of life is wider than the seas, more bright than the sun, sweeter than the sweetest waters: He may be trusted to nourish the soul of man.

PAGES FROM LIFE

VIII.—THE BOUND GOD

LIII

Transfiguration

I REMEMBER standing once in front of an arched stone doorway among the ruins of Glastonbury Abbey. I remember looking through it at a smooth green sward dotted with apple trees. The light was slanting crosswise, making vivid patches of yellow upon the emerald grass. The august framework of stone through which I saw this stretch of sward seemed to make it different from any green place I had ever seen. If one of Botticelli's angels with golden wings and circlet and a rose-coloured dress had lit down suddenly and walked barefoot over the turf he would have looked quite natural.

Forest trees will sometimes make a frame with trunks and arching branches for the small green glades that are here and there set down among

them. Through such a forest framework we have all seen the most smiling places; green parlours swept and ready for outlandish company; cathedral aisles; rings for dancing. It is through such a framework that the whole array of satyrs, nymphs, fauns, goddesses, wood spirits, and especially the Fair Family, have seemed not only possible but real and necessary. It is their setting that removes these wild lawns from the actual world and turns them into stages.

I remember, too, looking down a dark, arched passage and seeing a garden framed in a doorway at the other end, looking more divinely brilliant than ever a garden did when I was in it. The object of our desire, framed in the unattainable, shines with this particular lustre: the dark shadow of the separating arch enhancing the glow. Just so brilliant and alluring looks the happiness of to-morrow seen from amongst the realities of to-day. How beautiful is the face of to-morrow's friend: how predestined are his words! Within that framework that separates the known from the unknown, with what dignity and lustre our future moves and speaks before us.

Most wonderful of all, behind those tremendous doors that divide the known from the unknowable, transfiguration is accomplished.

LIV

The Real Inhabitants

SUN and stars and human creatures as well have each their own particular kind of envelope. Though this covering atmosphere is commonly invisible yet it is as alive as anything may be. Might one say that, like a mountain mist, it can lay a sensible finger upon you? Just as the invisible wind will sometimes blow stiff in your face, so gusts blown from a dangerous soul will somehow warn you away.

There are, then, the colourless atmospheres—the stagnant, thick atmospheres, choking and intolerable to vital creatures. There are light, bright atmospheres, inspiriting as the spring. There are heavenly atmospheres, so penetrating, so exquisite, that they will pervade a strange house on entering, and charge the commonest room with electrical sweetnesses.

In quite small children this atmosphere begins to be apparent. Later on, working through its own particular investing medium, the human

creature begins to fashion actual surroundings out of its thought and dreams.

There sits the curly-headed one upon the floor, with liquid eyes, so much alive; who can tell what structures he will one day rear up about himself? What he will one day accept, one day refuse?

His thoughts and dreams belong as yet to the great and powerful world of causes; they are as yet but a first faint shadow picture of the house of life which the creature within will erect about itself in the visible world. So strong are these shadowy powers that they may come to overthrow the most solid circumstances that fate can rear about the child in the beginning.

As the living creature grows on and becomes active, one sees that outside the substantial facts of its life are woven on all sides webs of curious relationships with the world without—loves, friendships, enmities, objects of pursuit. Yet again, around this construction reared up by that strange partnership of the visible and the hidden life, a rumour arises. As a big bell fills the air with sound waves spreading in circles that are broken when tossed by the wind and carried along for miles in this or that direction, so is the house of life surrounded by rings on rings of

resonance. This irregular borderland of rumour, that hedges round the live creature and its habitation, is made up of the echoes of living, twittering human voices that toss on evil report and good report in wider and wider circles. Such is the stuff of that fitful and unaccountable thing called reputation—that noise of chattering voices that surrounds every one of us from birth to death—and after—for a little while.

Yet because these voices are independently alive, they do not make a borderland as even and harmonious as the humming tones and overtones cast out by the bell (even though these may be broken up by the wind and scattered abroad). Rumour surrounding even a lovely personality may be uneven; discordant in patches, marked by ugly tints of lying and jealousy.

This is why it sometimes happens that the outer ring of a reputation gets a colour quite different to that of the central point from which it emanates. The most astonishingly false ideas are sometimes created. I have a friend who, when a little girl, was forbidden to go down a certain street in Camberwell:—The child believed and was led to believe that the Devil lived in that bad street. The devil was—Shelley!

One is often familiar with a person's reputation

years before meeting him. Contrariwise, one can know a man first and his true reputation and value years afterwards. I remember a little man in spectacles, down-looking, mouse-coloured, the curate of a rich church, the appendage of a dashing, showy dean. In my very young days, I only knew this man as an object of derision in playful society. Twenty years afterwards I discovered that this modest, derided creature was not only an original scholar, but also a man of that innate justness of temper that ranged his scholarship always on the right side. How to express such a man's reputation? a light ringed by vapours? a clouded sun? a mist with the light behind it?

The reverse of such a case every one must know: the splendid reputation, the ring of bright-armoured outposts blowing loud blasts of praise on their trumpets, the whispering at the corners of the tent, the dead man seated within.

On the other hand, I have seen a quiet, overcast spirit, subtle, wise, and secret in its motions, so cast a spell about a pale and reticent creature as to make a sensible glow around a presence unfelt otherwise, truly powerful in this.

What does the reputation of such a being consist in? A subtle exhalation perceptible only to finer spirits, and therefore spreading so

fine a medium as to form a sort of sidereal or other world reflection of the personality behind it?

Think of the delightfulness of such a second life—to live only as a perfume in purest airs.

Compare with such an effect as this the commotion set up by some magnetic personalities working on the plane of affairs. Magnificent is the House of Life, huge is the building; the clangour of it runs right round the world: the fabric appears strong enough to defeat time. The voices that only twitter about ordinary mortals are now raised into choruses of shouts and yells—shouts of adoration, yells of hatred—veritable howlings; till at times the vexed inhabitant shudders within his doors, amazed at the uproar he himself has created.

We get quite a different sort of reputation when the creature within is creative. This is a quality of the spirit independent of personal power, charm, or animal magnetism. The quietest creatures sometimes have this hidden faculty of creativeness.

You may find an unclean little ape of a man who is now and then visited by strange visions, and who has the power of bestowing on them the immortality of form. He who is creative becomes possessed of two reputations at once, one personal,

the other proper to his work. I knew one very fine person who had three: his own personal reputation, which was generous and gay, distinguished for social charm and culture; a second for clever work done under his own name; and a third reputation quite different from the other two, for exquisite and curious work, done under another name and other suggestion.

The odd thing about creative work is that it has an independent life of its own. The living organism throws off his *organon*; and this *organon* is not only vital but vitalizing. It may be in the shape of a thought, a picture, a building, a sonata, a poem; whatever it is, this created thing will have a separate existence of its own—the quality of the living seed thrown off by the plant.

One could even make a diagram of the creative artist and his work. The artist is stationed in the midst, a small central sun surrounded by irregularly thrown-off suns of his own creation—either brighter or less bright than the centre one (as a man's work is sometimes far more powerful than himself); each sun thrown off is itself a sphere revolving wrapped in its own atmosphere, of a different colour, and spreading about its borders a different light. About each sun lap the wave-ripples of differing opinion.

Very, very distressed is the creature in the centre if the lapping waves threaten to stifle or drown the beloved work of his hand or brain. People have even died of this distress; they have died too for grief at the loud chattering of opinion adverse to themselves. What a pity! What a foolish pity!

Only the wise princess in the *Arabian Nights* who stopped her ears against the voices obtained the golden bowl of sunny water and the cage with the singing bird. Had she hearkened to the voices that pursued her, she would have been turned to stone.

LV

The Forming of the Formless

TRISMEGISTUS, a forgotten seer, once had a vision of creation, and these are the veritable and majestic words in which he tells it. He first saw "a pleasing gladsome Light but interminated: afterwards appeared a horrible sad Darkenesse, and this moved downwards from the Eye of the Light, as if a cloud should come from the Sunne. This darkenesse was condensed into a certain water; but not without a mournful inexpressible voice or sound, as the vapours of the elements are resolved by Thunder. After this the holy Word came out of the light and did get on the water: he made all things."

The mystery of the Word is still unsolved, still present to-day. Creation is by no means ended. Everywhere in our eyes the forming of the formless is going on. The very air is pregnant with potential beauty. Let it be but cold enough and every window-pane becomes a forest-garden. On frosty nights out of doors one may feel the air

tingling as though swarms of tiny arrows were ready to fly. In a polar winter, not only does the breath fall in crystals, but even the sound of their forming, "minute crepitations," can be heard.

The rocks too are alive: the growth and the ways of the rock crystals are as wonderful as the ways of the rose; far beneath our feet the rocks are still forming, within their sober fingers holding gems. Down in the darkness they grow, crystals clearer than sparkling water; opals holding the broken colours of the sunset and dawn; topazes that are wells of sunlight though they have never seen the day.

Above in the free air the herbs and flowers have succeeded in conquering the earth; they have rolled it in a garment of green. They are pushing and striving together, green shoulder against green shoulder, holding up countless myriads of stars and cups and flower-hands to catch the precious light. They have learned to snatch and break it and paint themselves in its divided hues.

As for the creeping, moving life, it is a terror. The ground is teeming. We cannot set our foot upon the earth but it is an unkindness to some living thing. Each one has his little life and his little pleasures, and knows no more than his own eyes can see.

The greatest of the creatures are faintly aware of a life whose bounds are wider than their own. I have seen a dog sit and long to be a man. I have seen a bird at worship, with his head turned to the sky, adoring he knew not what.

From these small spirits to the brave kingdom of a man's mind is a wide leap; but the same law that splits the rocks and unbinds the flower is ordering there.

Even when we know, and have intimately known it, there is something in the presence of a master-mind that fills us with awe: we hear the sound of the wind that blows from whence we know not. If we were not so familiar with the mind and the doings of man we should consider him an unbelievable miracle. A creator within creation, the secret chamber of his spirit is lively with marvels; it is like a hall of invisible boundaries where night and day go on the forming of the formless in obedience to law.

They cannot help themselves, the thinkers, the poets, the painters, the musicians. They may even resist and stifle the impulse from within, and in spite of them it will thrive and flourish. It is within the master spirits that the law of creation is most operative; but all of us are subject to the same impulse; in every human creature the

spirit desires to flower; and the flowers of the mind are lovely and infinitely various. The potter at his wheel, the weaver at her loom, the boy with his tools, the little maid with her needle or her pencil, how astonishing they are!

What a catalogue it would make, that of the doers, the people whose hands and brains put beauty where nothing was! The farmer, whose ploughed fields, golden and green and brown, embroider the lands; that son of ecstasy, the gardener; the architect, who can drag splendours forth from stone and dignify the earth; the writer, who can create a living book; the artist and sculptor, who seize on beauty before it dies and give it life immortal among men; the musician, who releases the angel within; the rare statesman who can, within the horizon of his mind, conceive the ordered world, and by his mighty efforts pattern it out; the religious orator who can inflame them with the infectious brightness of his own inner light. All that army of angels by profession—doctors, nurses, schoolmasters, carriers of charity—Heavenly Scavengers who follow in the wake of the fools and the Men-of-Prey, striving always to redress the ruin that these have left behind—to create health out of disease, beauty and order out of human hideous-

ness, intelligence out of ignorance. These are the worthy ones, the creators, the servants of Mankind; conceivers and builders of the invisible mansions of the soul, of the visible excellencies and beauties which alone can exonerate Mankind.

And now comes a delightful thought. In spite of himself man must go forward. He must do better yet than he has ever done. The same decree that has taught even the rocks to blossom is absolute over him. Sin as he may, be as stupid and self-seeking as he may, still the steadfast laws of creation are urging him to good. The universal will in him is struggling towards beauty, although for the moment he set his desire across it. Man may be oppressed by hunger, plagues, pain, mire, stupidity, battle, madness, lust, and death; but in spite of them all, though wounded, he is magnificent still. What are these ills but the hammer-strokes that are forging the iron in him to greater ends? And even if those ends are never attained? Why, then, through the very struggle towards perfection, nay, because of the hardship of his failures, he has our love;—this bloody, dusty gladiator of creation, half stupid, often overpowered, who fights on still.

LVI

Angelos: The Messenger

THE afternoon of a spring day is the right moment to gather angelic suggestion from the flight of the larger birds. On such a day one may see the snow-white swans pass overhead high enough to get the blue of the heavens for a background, low enough to catch the gold and silver embroidery of the sunlight on their wings; low enough, too, for the musical clang of their passage to be heard.

Most moving and vision-like they go by; and at the hearing and the seeing something within rises and passes with them—ay, and beyond them —to a wider land than even our own blue elastic heavens.

What more easy task for the imagination than to add to those white appearances the human face, the consoling tongue, the admonishing hand, the unearthly message?—in true imagery thus to express the sudden, half-comprehended touch that visits, but how rarely, the spirit

within. The moment of the first appearance of an angel within the firmament of the human imagination is a very ancient and very wonderful moment indeed; and a true moment—true in experience, true in life.

For whenever we find some great universally accepted symbol, we may take it for granted that there is wise apprehension at the back of it. Take the halo, for instance; there is an ages-old perception of the fact of spiritual effluence and influence—a fact great in art and life and science, true through and through to the very roots of life.

The same may be said of the exalted dove and the plumed angels. (How strange it is that the bird remained the mightier, holier symbol of the two, as though the Messenger, in putting on the human, put off something of the divine!)

Behind them both there is a fact: they are the symbols of an everlasting verity.

For not an artist, not a poet, not a thinker, not a Saint, but is aware of a seldom, sudden visitation—inspiration—call it what you will; call it, as the Celts do the *awen*, the breath, that flows for one bright moment, whence we know not, passing then away; just as white birds in spring appear for one moment, crossing our skies.

Angelos: The Messenger

Here is what a well-known poet wrote to me once in a letter: "Sometimes when I am least sensual and most alive to pure thought, it seems to me that a sudden quickening comes as if through the air, like a wonderful bird coming to a tree. Is the tree ready? Is it good for singing upon? If not, the bird flies off again. But the song is in the bird, whether the tree is fair-branched or not. . . ."

That is the secret behind the dove and behind the angel, both, though differently, messengers to the soul.

(Grow well, O tree; fair and straight, O branches; put out leaf and blossom, whose perfume may call down the immortal bird.)

LVII

"I and My Beloved"

BETWEEN a man and the object of his desire there lies a path along which his thoughts continually run. At first this path is a little track no more substantial than a thread of gossamer upon which now and then a thought goes speeding. As the desire persists and increases in strength, this path grows gradually wider, and thoughts, wishes, and dreams run upon it in such increasing numbers, that the path is worn broad and at last becomes a highway.

The man and his desire are now straitly joined together. Between them runs a current of sympathy that in time transforms. In time the man and his desire are one. The secret of his heart is written broad upon his face for all the world to see.

The man of unlovely desires will in the end stand openly defiled.

Do you think you can hide the secret direction

of your thoughts? You may for a while; but only so long as they are weak and gossamer fine and thin. Once grown lusty, they will sit upon your forehead, laughing at you, and nodding openly to your acquaintance.

Even if you are fairly inclined and only by accident and compliance living easily from one enjoyment to another, those multitudinous trivial desires will each of them leave a finger-touch upon your face. It will bear a metallic lustre, a restlessness that will scare away the lovers of truth. The deep-hearted will pass you by.

On the other hand, even one fine taste will correct a plain exterior. I believe if an ugly common youth be but sincere and determined in his intellectual life, by the time he is fifty the very bones of his head will have risen up into a temple to do him honour.

One desire is enough to adorn a countenance: have you not seen that a child with a passion for flowers gathers something of flower softness on its face? The dreamer will cause you to see visions. The compassionate countenance is like an open sky.

And what if a man turn his face toward a heavenly ideal? What if he set his steps on the hither end of the long radiant path that leads

to perfection? Why, then, he will carry visibly in the daylight an illuminated brow. I have seen faces that seemed to me like the door into another world. He and His Beloved, are they not one?

LVIII

Intimation

SOMETIMES the days go by dull enough in the country of the mind. Perhaps for a month, or more, one may have idly wandered the better known ways of this strange territory, finding the same thoughts strolling the roads, the same ideas buzzing in the market-place, the same old sorrows rising mist-like from their places out yonder by the churchyard wall.

Then comes a new bright day when the air is clear and keen,—a good day for adventure. Seizing a propitious moment for escape from the buzzing crowd, one takes to one's heels, avoiding the ordinary day-time traffic, stealing along softly for fear of awaking the sleepers there by the wall.

What a pleasure to leave the road at last, to make towards the untravelled lands, towards that blue horizon line that promises the unknown, the hitherto unimagined!

What matter that one has set off this way scores of times already, only to be driven back

by weariness, or falling darkness; or else captured by those loud insistent calls and pursuing feet behind.

It may seem a sorry sort of pleasure to be travelling unexplored lands, without companion, without a guide, not even aware of what one seeks. Yet I know not how it is, can one but get off and away without any of these pettifogging little people of the market-place catching up behind—without any of those pale griefs rising from their bed yonder, to steal after and whisper, whisper, in one's ears—when one gets off and away, as I say, how fresh is the upland air!

The rough moors are silent and wide and long; the horizon line is distant; a confused mist trails upon the rising grounds. It is heavy going enough; yet for some reason that is unknown one begins to be twice alive.

"Without a guide" did I say? Yet a guide of a sort there must be. It is not of one's own will that one goes. Did not a call sound? Something is inviting, drawing one along; else why are the feet so light? Are there not monitious presences about? Else why this curious joy?

Further yet: far away now is the uproar of living. Nearer are the ultimate silences. Nearer those depths on depths where the rainbow shapes

are hiding in the folds of the glassy air. Enchantment draws one on. In this pure freshness one becomes three times alive. No calling from behind can drag one back, every breath is sweetness. Drinking in the mystery one becomes a part of it oneself.

Now the feet are no longer felt or detected; one is borne up along the hill-slopes. Faster and faster one is carried forward, as if on invisibly spread wings, through the long-desired blue. On a sudden comes the pausing, the stillness. The folds of the air shake and tremble; they are shot through with broken colours, broken lights. Suddenly they divide and a presence is revealed, awful, uncomprehended, heaven-eyed.

Not a word is spoken, not a whisper passes. Then the glassy folds tremble and are shaken together again; the presence vanishes, the hour is gone by.

Yet of that hour something remains—an inspiration that in time becomes a knowledge. In that we have been confronted by the unthinkable, lies for ever after the essence of our thought.

LIX

Medulla Animae

I HAD a dream of a man going in a white garment and carrying in his hand a crystal globe which I thought was his soul. It was only a poor little dream but it gave me to think when I awoke. For a very long time I had been searching for some image to comprehend what we call the spirit of man and had not been able to find it. I believe it is not to be found. Many people have searched for it. Marcus Aurelius speaks of it as an emerald, constant in colour. Christ speaks of the blowing wind. Saint Theresa writes of the soul as of a castle built of a pure diamond, an admirable crystal: within are successive chambers of increasing beauty leading to the central chamber where the heavenly inspiration is throned. Outside the castle are wild beasts, and mediæval dragons ramping in the darkness.

Poets have tried, by finding likenesses, to express the soul. Henry Vaughan after writing

of a bird who has been wetted by rain and blown by a rough wind all night and yet breaks out singing in the morning, says:

> "For each enclosed spirit is a star
> Enlight'ning his own little sphere."

Traherne tasks his imagination over and over searching for an image. "A strange extended orb of joy." "A world within." "A Deep Abyss." "A subtile and unbounded air." In such strange shape does his own soul appear to him.

It is the extraordinary vastness of the world of the spirit that defies expression. If we may take its borders to be commensurate with its furthest wanderings how shall we discover its vastness? What are its ranges and in what dimensions?

In the past that has been it lives and moves; in the future that is not, in the future that will never be, in the manifold present with its thousand gates.

Think of the spirit of one human creature as an elastic sphere, why then, it must be wider than the universe; for it embraces the whole visible world, it travels the whole company of the stars, inhabits the abyss in which they tremble and hang: then so bold and great does it grow, that

it arraigns the visible world and despises it: like some wild creature in prison shaking at the bars, it cries out for a greater liberty, it will be free of another universe, as yet unrealizable.

Here is its true home; it is when the ears and eyes are closed on the visible world, when the very firmament itself is despised, that the Spirit enlarges itself within its own dominions. Here it can choose its own pathways, fashion its own palaces of delight.

There are curious parallels between the seen world and this invisible kingdom. I am afraid to say how great and how splendid a world the kingdom of the soul may be, what gardens of pleasure may be there; what clear streams, what long long roads forth-stretching further and further towards the mysteries.

This kingdom of marvels is all for the conquering, all to be won by the labouring soul. No builder of a city of palaces ever had a task so great, no prince of the earth ever had such reward. I am quite sure there is no earthly joy to compare with the joy of the spirit; if the spirit is active and rejoicing, it can illuminate every moment of the humblest, most confined of lives. Without that spiritual life, a throne may be no wider than a prison or a tomb.

But the task is great; as vast as are the possible dominions of the soul, so huge is the labour of civilizing its untrodden wildernesses. Night and day the work goes on; all that is savage and unclean must be done away; fair gardens must be planted for the flowers of heaven to grow in; high and just and lovely must the palaces of thought be reared; perfectly built must be the temples for the soul's refuge; true and straight must the long roads be pushed out into the unseen.

And all this prodigious labour to be accomplished by, what? By the wildest, most wayward and ungovernable workman the world knows; by one that is inconstant as the wind, tumultuous as the sea, quick and dangerous as the lightning.

Yet before our souls were made, the law was made that every created thing must grow towards beauty. Fierce, cruel, gluttonous, and unclean though we be, the law is there. "Be ye therefore perfect" is a command that shines always like a distant star.

The law is there and the necessity; that others have obeyed is a certainty; the everyday miracle of a library may teach us that, if nothing else. But how, for us, who have ordinary and unskilled minds, is obedience possible? How is so wild a

creature, moving in a kingdom so incomparably vast, to be tamed and trained? Think of the difficulties. There is no straightforward path in thought: the mind moves in sweeps and circles; now mounting high, now in a low flight, like a swallow darting about the roofs of her home. As well place a live eagle at the altar's foot to bear all day the Holy Book upon its wings, as command your soul to an eternal feast of holy thoughts.

Take to your knees and close your eyes, if you will; set your spirit like the hands of a clock; it will be off and away in spite of you; away sporting with a thousand thousand images of the present and the past, endlessly forming fresh combinations out of the fluid future. As well train Pegasus to the plough or put a bridle on the wind as teach and direct too straitly so wild a creature as the soul. And if you play too much the master, then is the soul but the sad prisoner of the will; her light wings are folded down, her fair colour is faded; she hears no longer the eternal music as she treads her dull round.

Certainly the soul must be free; the will is the master of the actions but the servant of the soul. How then can this wild heavenly creature be

trained to the vast labour which she should endure?

I am inclined to think that the miracle accomplishes itself in freedom; that the master of the soul is joy.

I see her, the ethereal creature, made resplendent by joy; the centre of her many-planed domains, radiant, obedient, her eyes upon the eternal sources, her ear open to the heavenly call; cleansing her wide crystalline kingdom, accomplishing marvels, how, she knows not; nor why; save that she is invisibly commanded.

How should she not be bright and excellent, this wild angelic leader of our thought: in her essence she is divine; her food is mystery; her joy can call down the heavens; her sorrow is the beginning of the hope of our earth.

LX

The Bound God

ON Exmoor there are wide stretches of ground where the heather grows in rounded masses of brown and purple, and the gorse shapes itself into green tussocks stiffened with a million of small spears. The moor swells up on the horizon line into mighty arcs, suggesting vast wheel-like circles whose lowest curve is rooted deep in earth. Whatever colours the sky may be dressed in, blue, grey, white, or cloudy black, there is always delight abroad. And the summit of that delight is expressed from early dawn till evening by the larks that hang like daylight stars in heaven. Underneath that perpetual falling rain of notes, I used to walk the green paths of the moor, among the decent sheep, at a time when human blood was flowing in streams from Flanders to Armenia. Then I pondered much on the mystery of the shedding of blood; seeking always to justify God through the symbol of man, and to justify man through the ends of God and not finding how.

It is a strange mystery, that of the blood. We stand upon the earth like alabaster vases full of a

crimson treasure, sealed to the eye. At the lips we get a hint of its presence. We can see its colour between the fingers of the hand when held up to the light; we divine its wavelike motion as it rises and falls in a young maid's face.

When the snow-white vase is broken and the treasure spilt, how does the sight of that bright stream affect all living things! Anyone who has seen the madness that seizes on cattle at the sight of blood will not readily forget it; what a fight they can put up against sticks, stones, yells, and barking dogs to get at and destroy the wounded one. Dwellers on lonely Australian farms tell how, when there has been a slaughtering of cattle, the herds will come down in the night-time like a dark tossing sea, till those within tremble at their roaring and the shaking of the ground. Bellowing they tear up the stained earth with their hoofs, till they pass moaning away into the night. So do the stags, when the hunt has got one of their number, come down to roar and trample in the night-time about the spot.

Every one is more or less affected by the sight of blood. A hearty young policeman over six foot has been known to fall his length along at the sight of a woman after her husband had dealt with her on a Saturday night. "To see red" on

a battlefield is an expression at the back of which stands a considerable natural fact, though by no means all fighting men prove it for themselves. Since the shedding of blood has this overwhelming effect on all created things, what wonder if the sacrificial torrent lately poured out abroad affected the minds of many of us. For us the springs of life were troubled; even the very appearances of familiar things were altered. Terrible images peered suddenly from behind the known, the familiar. On the open moor, the green paths did not appear as green or as friendly as in other years; the spines of the gorse, were they not like pricking bayonets? the blue of the polygala flowers—just such a blue was in many a dead lad's eyes. The lark's notes over all, were they not dropping tears of blood? Was that thunder in the heavens? Or was it the malediction of the gun?

Hard though the sacrifice of blood may be, there is another more terrible that hangs by it. The spear may pierce the side and the blood stream forth and the life with it. Well, it is soon over, soon done; the brave spirit is tranquil in passing. Above and beyond this sacrifice is that of the wounded mind that cries, "My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" Count them by hundreds of thousands, these wounded minds;

and remember, too, that the nobler the mind, the deeper the wound. What faith, what steadiness of spirit could these inherit out of such a conflagration of the passions—such a new form of chaos?

So thinking, it happened to me that the little creature within (who knows more than we do of the secrets of the universe) rose and showed me a dream. Now the fabulous dream is such an immemorial device that one hesitates to tell even a perfectly true one: all the apology that can be made for mine is that it has little seeming relation with the disturbed thinking out of which it grew. Since it was a true dream, since the mind to which it occurred finally drew from it a vital idea, it may as truly be written down.

It seemed I was walking over ground like the moor above, but rougher and greyer. The sort of half light that generally obtains in dream made clear the straggling bushes and the sandy ground. For a long time I stumbled on; then my foot touched something and warned me to stop. On the ground before me lay a vast something, indistinguished in the grey light. Fear seized upon me and a cold awe, as I peered and peered about. Was not that a huge limb half embedded in the sand? Surely those were great shoulders—ah, and a face! I walked by: there before me was

the mask of a human countenance, human yet not human, incredibly majestic, eyes closed, chin raised, locks of hair seeming to grow downwards into the sand. The light was very dim, but I could see a quiver pass over the face, and the whole bulk of the frame and the ground under me seemed to shake. My fear increased, and I awoke.

At first I thought little of the dream, but the recollection of it continued to visit me. The solemn twilight, the sand, the ghostly stillness haunted me: still more the mighty countenance, the hair that rooted itself in the ground, the slight struggle that ran along the huge frame; the sand-grey colour over everything, except the shadowy hair. Then one day I thought, "So do the gods shape themselves and rise from the earth. The dream thought so, at any rate." To myself I called the dream "The Bound God"; more and more it haunted me.

One day at an odd moment the thought came to me, that apprehension of the bound and suffering God is ages and ages old. How fearfully, how powerfully, it is expressed in the story of Prometheus—the rock and the chains, the beak of the vulture, the agony and the dripping blood! And again in the story of Christ, once more the defeat, the helplessness, the agony; once more

the dripping blood. The blood of a God! What daring, what outrageousness in the thought!

In the dream there was no bloodshed, but the dream itself had arisen from the thought of it. The two were close knit in my mind. That huge and helpless sleeper became to me as the God in the soul of man that was struggling in its sleep, trying to free itself, trying to rise from the earth.

Here at last was a religion in which I could believe. And lo! it was a religion ages old. And not only ages old, but also our own, though now so clustered about with the growths of ancient years that much of its value for the hard-working mind is lost.

Yet how simple it is! and obvious! Even the outrageously rich, so gold-plated, so insensitive that they cannot feel, should see that the vital spirit that makes for order, beauty, harmony, is being continually suppressed. We get broken notes, lost glimpses, withered lives, defeated souls. Constantly the God is wounded, so that he cannot rise; and yet he rises evermore, and evermore conquers, if not here, then there.

Often it happens in the lives of men that the defeat is too bitter; the salt field of blood is too grim, they cannot rise. For them God Himself is slain for all eternity, and they go out in bitter-

ness. I have seen them, these noble ones. And I have seen a thousand exiles sit together in their misery, their backs turned upon God. Yet could they but have caught a glimpse of the mighty sufferer who struggles to rise, of the wounded God, perhaps their own anguish might have been quenched by a new impulse.

It was the robin, once all brown, that flew to the Cross and tried with its beak to pull the nail from the wounded hand of the Christ; in that way he came by the blood-stained breast which he has worn in honour ever since. Twice happy stain! and lucky bird to be the servant of a suffering God. To attempt such a deed, even though, like the robin's, it were all in vain; to put out a hand to loose Prometheus from his rock, to free an angel from the clay—one would come back to life from the dead to be at such work.

O bound and tortured Gods, light carriers, light bringers, spit upon, dying, faint! O incomparable triumph of renewed sweetness in the soul! Yours shall be my service, yours my life.

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